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**LIVING AND DYING IN MODERN TIBET  
THE TIME OF GREAT CALAMITIES**

by

ཨོ་རྒྱན་ཉི་མ། Orgyan Nyima

# NOTICE

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I encourage all who would like to translate this text into other languages and make it available for free to do so.

Orgyan Nyima



# PREFACE

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I was born in Lungda Village located in a Kham<sup>1</sup> area in the early 1970s, attended a local primary school in the early 1980s, and received an undergraduate education in a provincial level college. Memories of my early life in Lungda Village are my vivid companions. Let me give you some examples:

Daily village life moved to a rhythm of herding, milking, fetching water, spreading fresh dung on the ground to dry, collecting dry dung, and chatting.

One day, three people speaking a southern (south of Gawa) dialect visited Trashi Penpa's home. Children of the host family called one of the men 'Uncle Handless'. He was in his fifties and his name matched him. His arms ended at his wrists, which were covered with skin. It seemed elbows had replaced his hands. He wore a wool-fabric robe that had probably never been washed. The natural wool color had become darker over the years. His arms were just like the upper legs of Trashi Penpa's pawless dog. We called the dog 'Pawless', which was why I assumed the host family children addressed their distant uncle as 'Uncle Handless'.

Those who speak this southern dialect seemed in constant need of barley, the basic staple food. If a household lacked barley, we assumed that they were short of all other food. Beggars, wanderers, and barley traders often seemed to speak the same dialect. They might have been from Zurmang, Nangchen, or Chamdo. I could not distinguish between dialects very well. Locals called these people Lhowa 'Southerners'.

The host family accompanied their guests to each community household to trade strings of small bells for barley, trailed by the crippled dog. I was frightened when Trashi Penpa's children escorted Uncle Handless through the gate. I was sitting on Grandmother's lap as she spun wool in the courtyard. I was scared of strangers who spoke dialects

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<sup>1</sup> Kham is a traditional Tibetan area mainly in parts of present-day Qinghai and Sichuan provinces, and the Tibet Autonomous Region.

different than my own because Grandmother threatened that she would give me to strangers to be their son when I was very disobedient.

My fear was gradually replaced by curiosity. Uncle Handless had many thumb-sized bells in strings around his left arm. It was fun to watch the action. Uncle Handless energetically ordered his companions to do this and that. It seemed that the other two men didn't know what to do without him. Grandmother traded a small bag of barley for a string of bells. Holding the upper cover of the bags, Uncle said, "Tie it," and another man tied the bag shut with string. They then continued door to door, visiting every household.

I followed them as did other children. Uncle Handless held the bags and the balance, did the weighing, and counted the bells. He did it all very skillfully. In the end, various-sized bags of barley accumulated in Trashi Penpa's family courtyard. Three men weighed, reloaded, and marked the bags. They also traded brown sugar for barley. I did not understand the trade arrangement for these items.

The barley traders soon left, leaving tinkling bells here and there in the village. Children rhythmically shook strings of bell, competing to see who could make the most noise. Bells were hung under the gate roof to ring when the gate opened. Bells were also hung around the neck of favorite goats and sheep. The tinkle of bells was truly Uncle Handless's legacy.

Uncle Handless had been a terribly bad man – a criminal, a murderer, a thief, a bandit, and a vicious fighter. His habitual evil was unstoppable until he was made physically incapable of carrying out criminal acts. In the end, his legendary criminal life was ended by a local chief, who ordered that his hands be amputated carefully so as to not leave bone fragments in the wounds.

**...the darkest part of our history - a time when starvation and modern weapons of war - planes, mortars, and machine guns threatened our very physical existence...**

History abounds with tragedy. War, starvation, a frightened fugitive existence, forced incarceration in labor camps, death, and so on - they

all figure in the history of many individuals, families, and nations. Such tragic experiences are deeply embedded in the memories of those who witnessed or experienced them. Rural illiterates in pre-industrialized environments often have little sense of the value of recording their own history. Time steadily obliterates unrecorded history as dementia and death rapidly erase lived experience from space and memory. As this older generation passes on, their narratives become ever more distant and faded.

My childhood memories include the accounts I heard from my parents' and grandparents' generations as they recounted experiences from their, at that time, recent pasts. Those who were twenty years of age and older had all experienced the darkest part of our history - a time when starvation and modern weapons of war such as planes, mortars, and machine guns threatened our very physical existence. Their memories and stories were fresh, clear, and vivid.

I interviewed several locals who were born in the 1930s and 1940s. Their individual narrative accounts are presented without judgment. The same name that occurs in different narratives refers to the same person. All narrators were from villages near each other and narrators tell, at times, the same general story from different angles. For example, Dorje Trashi and Sonam Trashi fled together as fugitives. Each refers to the other in their account as 'Cousin'. The different perspectives of their common journey complement each other.

**Memories are  
who we are,  
where we have  
been, and  
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our coherence.**

As the narrators talked to me about their past, they were transported back to that violently chaotic era. Memories, refreshed, they recalled people from their past and remembered more events. Narrators questioned their own stories and repeatedly said, "It is hard to believe what we went through." Their grandchildren, and even their own children, continue to question the harsh reality of what their parents and grandparents experienced.

Violence is a recurring theme. The stories occurred in a particular historic context in which violence and death drove events

and were commonplace. Violence is memorable, and highlights the ordinary lives of the narrators as they recalled and relived their pasts as I talked to them. As Eric Hoffer wrote, "The game of history is usually played by the best and the worst over the heads of the majority in the middle." In the context of this book, the game of history favored the worst by providing them a platform to perform the dark side of human nature, inevitably creating a mountain of misery.

In the second decade of the twenty-first century, a global, consumer-based economy drives every corner of a Tibet that has been embraced by a market-driven economy. RMB provides, on the surface at least, whatever is desired.

Many locals seem to have accepted the value of relentlessly pursuing material prosperity. Locals self-sustaining livelihood has largely vanished. Many farmers no longer farm and many herders no longer herd. Villages are incorporated into cities. Trade between pastoralists and farmers has no modern role.

The narrators' description of the economic and cultural background of their lives before and during the political and military interventions in their home area provides a rich tapestry upon which social economic perspectives have played out. This history of calamity is still largely untouchable, given modern political realities. I masked the names of villages, monasteries, and certain individuals. Anonymity is the only mechanism narrators and I can use to honestly present these accounts. By the year 2025, few witnesses to this time will still be alive, emphasizing the value of this book.

These interwoven, connected narratives describe events in the geographic center of the Tibet Plateau in the mid-twentieth century. It is an enormous area where great mountain ranges have an average altitude of 5,500 meters. Countless snow-covered peaks exceed 6,000 meters. Even in midsummer, snow colors the peaks white. Many tiny streams of melting snow run through innumerable alpine valleys,

**I record individual lives in the context of historical events while describing the local culture, economy, and intimacies of individual narrators.**

rushing to join the greatest rivers of Asia that originate here. These streams water the grassland and provide drinking water for people, livestock, and wildlife.

These vast areas are overwhelmingly pastoral. Few areas are suitable for agriculture. The limited farmland is in deep valleys where narrow barley fields parallel river banks. Roasted barley ground into flour is mixed with butter, hot tea, dried cheese, and sugar and then eaten. Historically, farmers and herders obtained *tsampa* 'barley flour', butter, and cheese from each other, meeting mutual needs at annual trade fairs during winter religious festivals in farming areas. *Tsampa* is thus a food that perfectly combines pastoral and agricultural products. Each group could not have produced such food without acquiring part of the ingredients from the other.

This book is a record of individual lives in the context of historical events while describing the local culture, economy, and intimate events of individual narrators. My childhood was little different from Mother's and Grandmother's childhoods in term of food, housing, and way of life. This allows me to understand and articulate the narrators' cultural background. Grandmother and I both grew up in the same century-old two-story house. The ground floor was divided into an animal shelter and a barley storage room. Two small glassless windows featured four vertical wooden bars to keep out stray cats. The main house door was located in the animal shelter. A glassless window provided light for that dark room.

A wooden-framed yak-leather box containing barley was the same height as Grandmother, who was much taller than Mother. Grandmother easily poured barley into the top of that hair-covered leather box and then took grain out from the bottom by opening a small hole whenever grain was needed. I am sure Grandmother was reluctant to enter the dark storage room when she was a child. She used to threaten to lock me inside that room when I became very disobedient. This warning worked, as I pictured the hairy box in the dark corner transforming into a monster.

No electricity and no plastic products cluttered my early childhood. The first time that I saw an electric light bulb was in Father's home when I was six. I switched the light on and off out of curiosity and to amuse myself. Father told me not to stare at the bright



bulb because it would hurt my eyes. I then, of course, stared at the shining bulb when Father was absent and thought, "It doesn't hurt my eyes. My eyes aren't painful."

I was dressed in traditional homemade costume - a sheep-skin robe in winter and a cloth robe in summer. Mother was a skilled seamstress and made my boots, shirts, and robes. She also helped sew for neighbor children.

Grandmother and Great Grandmother ate the same food as I did. Our food supplies were seasonal. Potatoes, meat, and fresh butter were available in autumn and winter. Old meat, old butter, and dried meat were characteristic of spring food, which I disliked. Yogurt, milk, and cheese were abundant in summer. We even fed yogurt to dogs.

Narrators featured in this book had much the same cultural and economic environment as I did. I was born at the right time, and in the right place to empathetically understand, interpret, translate, and record their narratives.

The narrators are the real authors. Memories are who we are, where we have been, and where we will go. They are our coherence.

Orgyan Nyima

# CONTENTS

---

**Preface** <4>

**Contents** <10>

**Narrators** <16>

## **Part One: Two Decades Before the Red Chinese Occupation** <20>

---

- **Chodron: One** <22>
  - Jangtsang Awo Marries Great Grandaunt <22>
  - Jangtsang Awo is a Hero <23>
  - The Tibet Army is Defeated <27>
  - Consulting A Deity <29>
- **Samdrubcho** <32>
  - Five Tribes Against Drawu <32>
  - Reinforcement Troops From Ziling <33>
- **Chodron: Two** <36>
  - The Dege-Drawu Conflict <36>
  - Chodron Gives an Eyewitness Account <43>
- **Choying Dorje** <46>
  - A Rolling Boulder <46>
  - Encountering a Ghost <47>
  - Renouncing Hunting <47>
  - A Mountain Deity Kidnaps Grandfather's Servant <48>
  - Grandfather Fights the Tibet Army <51>
  - Uncle Butruk <51>
  - Unexpected Peaceful Liberation <54>

## **Part Two: 1940s-1970s** <58>

---

- **Lhakpa Wangmo** <60>
  - Father's Caravan Trip <61>
  - Chinese Come to Our Village <63>
  - Village Men Hide in the Mountains <65>

- Escape From the Village <67>
- Commune Life <70>
- Attending a Tent School <71>
- Chasing Wolves Away <73>
- A Deity Protects the Sheep <75>
- The Fate of Tsering's Family <76>
- Father's Death <82>
- Drolma Saves People <86>
- Home Again <88>
- Killing a Leopard <92>
- Brother's Death <96>
- Stealing Barley <97>
- The Cultural Revolution <101>
- Destroying Religion <106>
- Confessions <109>
- Worshipping Mao <111>
- Kidnapped by a Ghost <113>
- Mother Visits Drolma in Dondrubling Town <117>
- Dog Massacre <118>
- Becoming a Mother <121>
- Kunga Zangpo <126>
  - Encounter a Hared-Lipped Red Man <126>
  - Joining the Resistance <127>
  - Suffering from Public Struggle Meetings <133>
- Paldan <136>
  - Watching a Battle From a Tent <136>
- Gedar <140>
  - My Parents and Aunt Die <140>
  - I Saved a Chinese Man and Good Karma Returned to Me <141>
- Chimé Wangmo <142>
  - A Pregnant Nun <142>
  - A Fugitive Life <143>
  - Life in Prison <144>
- Sonam Trashi <148>
  - Carving *Mani* Stones After Grandfather's Death <148>
  - Learning to Write Tibetan <149>

- Herders' Visits <153>
- Trade Between Herders and Farmers <156>
- Bandits <158>
- A Novice Monk <161>
- Trucks <163>
- A Mysterious Sound <163>
- Father's Double Identity <163>
- Hydrophobia <165>
- Rich and Poor <166>
- Journey to the Holy City <169>
- No Food After the Night Raid <184>
- Return Home <192>
- My Fugitive Life <195>
- Our Fugitive Life Ends and Father's Arrest <197>
- Starving to Death <201>
- Second Fugitive Life <202>
- Eating With Pigs <205>
- From Street Child to Thief <206>
- Marmot Hunting, Tractor Mechanic, and Becoming a Father <212>
- Tsewang Chodron <220>
  - The Airstrike <220>
  - Mistaken for the Daughter of a Prominent Figure <222>
- Tsering Sonam <226>
  - Dukarkyab <226>
  - Protecting the Naturally Arisen *Mani* Stone <232>
- Chimé <238>
  - King Gesar's Failed Divination <238>
  - Stealing Horses <240>
  - The Battle in Dondrubling <242>
- Dorje Trashi <248>
  - My Fugitive Life <248>
  - Gakla People Kill a Chinese Man <254>
  - *Lhawa* - the Spirit Medium <255>
  - Embracing the Motherland <257>
  - A Fruitless Harvest <259>

- Robbery <260>
- Grandmother's Death <261>
- Mother's Death <261>
- The Hard Winter of 1960 <262>
- Disobeying a Teacher <265>
- Tortured <266>
- A Bowl of Roasted Barley <270>
- Killing a Goat <271>
- The Commune Discovers the Hidden Mutton <272>
- Trawa and I Injure Each Other's Feet <273>
- The Death of Ache <275>
- Sentence Assembly Meeting <280>
- Displacement <283>
- Becoming a Butcher <284>
- Rinam <286>
  - Trade Between Herders and Farmers <286>
  - Cloth in the Drito Area <288>
  - Mother Gives Our Property to a Lama After Father's Death <289>
  - I Work for the Monastery <290>
  - Wrongly Sent to a Concentration Camp <292>
  - Transporting Barley for the Chinese <293>
  - Stepfather is Released from Jail in 1970 <298>
  - Hunting Musk Deer and an Explosion in the Village <300>
  - Team Leader <301>
  - My Brothers' Visits <304>
- Anam <306>
  - Raised by Grandparents <306>
  - My First Child <308>
  - The Road to Chamdo <310>
  - My Grandparents Drank Truck Oil <313>
- Trashhi Jikme <318>
  - The Harvest <318>
  - Chinese Come with Beasts with Two Backs <320>
  - Following the Drawu Chief <321>
  - A Shell Strikes My Tent <322>

- Mother is Arrested <325>
- I Become Mad <326>
- Donyak <328>
  - Village Rebellion <328>
  - Diarrhea <333>

**Afterword** <336>

**Tibetan and Chinese Terms** <340>



# NARRATORS

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**Anam** (b. 1932) of Norbuling Village once worked for better-off families as a maid and was skilled in making woolen material. She witnessed deserted villages after most local residents fled their homes and became fugitives and was forced to do harsh, road construction work between Riwoche and Chamdo in 1960. Her love relationship ended tragically. She later lived with her son in Norbuling Village. Anam is Chimé Wangmo's cousin.

**Chimé** (b. 1938) of Makra Village participated in the rebellion at Gling Monastery in 1958, experienced the life of a fugitive in the mountains of the Yangtze River gorge for nine years, and joined the production team in his village in 1967.

**Choying Dorje** (b. 1956) of Patang, a grandson of Jangtsang Awo, lived for years with Uncle Butruk, a son of Jangtsang Awo. He gave accounts about Jangtsang Awo and Uncle Butruk. Lhakpa Wangmo, Rinchen, Tsering Sonam, and Choying Dorje are cousins.

**Chodron** (1925-2010) of Bari Village was the oldest member of the Tsatsa Family when I visited her. Her accounts of the early twentieth century were exceptionally clear and detailed. She witnessed the Tibet Army invasion and the war between Drawu and Dege. She gave accounts of her uncle, Jangtsang Awo, and her family history. Chodron, Lhakpa Wangmo's father, Rinchen, and Tsering Sonam's father are cousins.

**Donyak** (b. 1940) witnessed and participated in a village rebellion against soldiers and policemen. His family's property was looted by Mongolian soldiers. He became a fugitive. He nearly died from diarrhea and malnutrition in a labor camp. He lived in his village after he returned. He was satisfied with his retired life.



**Dorje Trashi** (b. 1946) of Lungda Village, had the same fugitive life experience as Sonam Trashi. He and his three sisters ended up in an orphanage in Norbuling Village after his mother's death. He stole food whenever he could during the years of starvation. After joining a work team, he became a commune butcher. He also witnessed the Cultural Revolution.

**Gedar** (b. 1940) of Rashul, a distant cousin of Sonam Trashi and Dorje Trashi, experienced an ambush that killed his parents, aunt, and injured his knee. His group also raided a commune site and killed some Chinese, including women and children. He saved a Chinese man from an angry Tibetan fellow. Later, the Chinese man helped him.

**Trashi Jikme** (b. 1945) lived in Lungpu Village until moving to Norbuling Village in 2008. While a fugitive in Gozhung and Muzhung, he survived an artillery shell that struck and burned down his tent and witnessed the shooting down of a PLA<sup>2</sup> warplane by Tibetan rebels. He experienced starvation and insanity. After joining the 818 Faction during the Cultural Revolution, he and was one of the escorts who took prisoners to an assembly. Sonam Trashi and Dorje Trashi are Trashi Jikme's wife's cousins.

**Kunga Zangpo** (1930-2004) of Lungpu Village, joined the Chuzhigangdruk in Gozhung. He was a target of public struggle meetings in his village during the Cultural Revolution. His family moved from Lungpu to Norbuling Village in the 1990s. He is Chimé Wangmo's cousin.

**Lhakpa Wangmo** (b. 1946) of Lungda Village experienced the life of a fugitive with her family and (her aunt) Wangmo in Drito. She became a commune shepherd when she was twelve years old. Tsering Sonam, Rinchen, Tsewang Chodron, and Choying Dorje are her cousins. Their fathers were brothers in the Jangtsang Family. She moved to Norbuling Village in 1981.

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<sup>2</sup> People's Liberation Army.

**Paldan** (b. 1944) of the Gozhung Area witnessed the airstrikes on the Chuzhigangdruk,<sup>3</sup> the resistance group, and the death of Lhowa Lama, a rebel leader.

**Rinam** (b. 1937) of a herding community in Drito County, experienced an impoverished life after his mother donated their property to a lama as a post-death funeral activity after his father died. He worked as a servant for monks in Gonsar Monastery, worked transporting barley for the PLA, and became a production team leader. He married Chokar.

**Samdrubcho** (1935-2002) of Norbuling Village gave accounts of local tribal opposition to the Drawu Chief in the 1940s. Samdrubcho lived in Nepal for three decades, returned to Norbuling Village in the 1990s, and died in a traffic accident in Dondrubling in 2002.

**Sonam Trashi** (b. 1947) of Norbuling Village, a monk novice, travelled to Lhasa by caravan to complete a monkhood ritual. After this journey, he became a fugitive with his relatives, including his cousin, Dorje Trashi, in Gozhung and Muzhung. As a homeless, street-boy, he fought other boys over pig slops and horsemeat. He was adept at stealing food from military camps and hunted marmots and rabbits. He married Lhakpa Wangmo and lived in Norbuling Village.

**Tsering Sonam** (b. 1947) of Lungda Village is Rinchen's sister and Lhakpa Wangmo's cousin. She was present when Dorje Trashi and Rinchen slaughtered a goat,<sup>4</sup> helped Dukarkyab and his uncle and sister (Karlha) when they were in desperate need during the Cultural Revolution, and also provided an account of her second husband risking his life and enduring torture to protect a holy *mani* stone. She is Lhakpa Wangmo's cousin.

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<sup>3</sup> Four Rivers, Six Ranges was an organization of Tibetan resistance fighters who attempted to overthrow PRC rule in Tibet.

<sup>4</sup> See Dorje Trashi's narrative.

**Tsewang Chodron** (b. 1945) of Shargu Village is Lhakpa Wangmo, Tsering Sonam, and Rinchen's cousin. She narrated events from 1959 to 1961 that include her life as a fugitive and witness to a battle at a monastery. Escorted to Chamdo, she was wrongly accused of being the daughter of a local prominent figure. She lived in her home village when I interviewed her.

**Wangmo** (1925-2003) of Lungda Village experienced the life of a fugitive with her niece (Lhakpa Wangmo), her daughter, and her sister in the Drito Area. In 1960, she was sentenced to twenty years in prison, where she experienced the starving times and witnessed frequent death. She was released in 1961, lived with her daughter, became a nun in 1985, and died at home in 2003.

# **PART ONE**

## **Two Decades Before the Red Chinese Occupation**



# CHODRON: ONE

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History is a novel for which the people is the author.  
--Alfred de Vigny (1797-1863)

Chodron (1925-2010) of Bari Village was the oldest member of the Tsatsa Family when I visited her. Her accounts of the early twentieth century were made with great clarity and detail. She witnessed the Tibet Army invasion and the war between Drawu and Dege. She gave accounts of her uncle, Jangtsang Awo, and her family history. Chodron, Lhakpa Wangmo's father, Rinchen, and Tsering Sonam's father are cousins.

## Jangtsang Awo Marries Great Grandaunt

Our homeland was not so peaceful before the Red Chinese came. The invasion of the Tibet Army from Lhasa in the 1930s, internal conflicts between local chiefdoms, and the Drawu and Dege conflict in the 1940s - they are all in my memory. However, these conflicts were small and the impact was minimal. Problems only lasted a few months or a few days. Local militias played the main roles in these conflicts.

When Jangtsang (b. 1850)<sup>5</sup> and his family reached Gawa, they settled about fifteen kilometers from Dondrubling in the beautiful Patang Valley on a bluff that was later called Jangtsang Bluff. Their life in the new area was not what they had expected. Facing a harsh reality, Jangtsang's brother (b. 1860) was compelled to leave Patang for Nakchu, where he married a local woman. He never returned to Gawa.

Jangtsang married Great Grandaunt from the Tsatsa Family in Bari Village, which was near Dondrubling Village. This family was

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<sup>5</sup> This and other dates are approximate.

the first Bari Village resident. The Tsatsa Family was originally from Gyalmonsarong, Sichuan.

In those days, a Nyingma<sup>6</sup> monastery, a Sakya monastery, and a nunnery were located on a hill. The Nyingma monastery was the largest. The Sakya master, Sherab Gyamtso, came to Dondrubling to extend his influence, but was not generally welcomed. However, the Tsatsa Family was devoted to him so the master stayed with them. The family contributed material assistance to help make the Sakya master's mission a success.

The Sakya Sect Monastery grew larger and eventually annexed the other monastery and nunnery. The Tsatsa Family's contribution to the Sakya monastery was significant. This was recorded in the monastery chronological mural in the main temple. The Tsatsa Family was proud of their contribution.

### Jangtsang Awo is a Hero

The Tibet Army successfully recovered territory from Chinese control in the Sichuan Tibetan area and became increasingly ambitious. Their next objective was the Tsongon Tibetan area. After easily gaining control of territory from the Nangchen Kingdom without resistance, their aim was to unite all the Tibetan areas.

Everyone was talking, hearing, and thinking about the Tibet Army. Locals knew about the Tibet Government's heavy taxes and feared such a burden. Meanwhile, the Drawu Chief had built friendly relations with the Ma Bufang<sup>7</sup> Authority through a complicated web of connections. Ziling<sup>8</sup> charged the Nangchen Kingdom a tax that was much less than Lhasa's for soldiers' provisions as a protection fee.

Drawu was the most powerful chief in the Nangchen Kingdom. Drawu Jikme (b. 1880) was his chief lieutenant. Drawu

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<sup>6</sup> Nyingma is the oldest of the four major schools of Tibetan Buddhism - Kagyu, Sakya, Gelug, and Nyingma.

<sup>7</sup> Ma Bufang (1902-1973) was once chairman of the Qinghai Provincial Government. Much bloody conflict with Tibetans in Qinghai characterized his rule in the 1930s and 1940s. In the summer of 1948, the Communist forces arrived and defeated Ma Bufang's soldiers.

<sup>8</sup> Ziling (Xining) = capital of Tsongon (Qinghai) Province.

Jikme ordered his soldiers to be ready to protect local homes and, meanwhile, sent a message to Ziling requesting assistance. Drawu stationed troops on several peaks around Dondrubling as the Tibet Army approached Dondrubling along different routes.

Uncle Jangtsang Awo, the son of Jangtsang (b. 1880), and his brother-in-law were responsible for protecting their homes. They were stationed at Shangla Hill, a place where no human habitation could be seen for dozens of kilometers. It was here that they encountered a group of Tibet Army soldiers. To inform the reinforcement Ziling Army and then wait for their arrival would have taken too much time. Uncle and his brother-in-law then resolved to sacrifice their lives to stop the Tibet Army and took cover behind a boulder, which protected them from bullets. Their weapons were locally made rifles. Uncle had a powerful amulet, so bullets didn't hurt him when the two sides began shooting at each other. The bullets bounced from the boulder, sending bits and pieces flying in all directions. Some struck his face, making it swell. He continued returning fire and the Tibet Army could not march one step forward.

Their return fire faded after Uncle's brother-in-law was injured. The Tibet Army then seized this opportunity. A soldier snuck up on Uncle, who fired at him, but his bullets didn't hurt the soldier. Uncle, assuming he wore a powerful talisman, coated a bullet with his brother-in-law's blood and carefully fired at the man, who collapsed. Uncle's rifle muzzle became red hot and useless. Knowing he couldn't continue to fight, he threw their two rifles into a river. He was then captured and taken to a Gelug monastery a half-day away.

We were very worried when we heard this ominous news. Uncle had halted the Tibet Army's forward movement for a day, which gave the Drawu troops more time to prepare. Word of Uncle's heroism spread locally. Reputation and honor meant nothing to his wife, who only worried about Uncle's well-being.

Drawu Jikme was very concerned about Uncle and sent a message to the Tibet Army headquarters: "Please don't hurt the captive. I will die next if the captive has any problems."

Tibet Army soldiers bound Uncle to a pole in the monastery's yard to await judgment. There was enough evidence against Uncle to execute him, but the Army hesitated because this would hamper



future possibilities to cooperate with Drawu and they were also a bit afraid of Drawu.

Gerak was a local leader and did not want to offend Drawu. Drawu and Jangtsang Awo, shared ancestors and maintained a friendship. Gerak treated Uncle cleverly. To please the Tibet Army, he pretended to watch the prisoner, but then treated Uncle kindly at night. He was more concerned about Uncle than other captives.

Tales made him a legend: Drawu Jikme was an incredible man and always victorious. There was also a story about Drawu Jikme planting chaff and harvesting barley. Grandfather proudly said, "Ha ha...the Drawu Chief's chaff became barley."

During sowing time, the Tibet Army was ready to march to Dondrubling along the Jamé, Trawola, and Rashul routes and dispatched envoys to negotiate with Drawu before their offensive. Several Tibet Army captains impolitely came to Drawu's home. When they entered the room, Jikme was chanting his daily scripture. The Tibetan captains cursed Jikme, "You are a fox, a woman, a son-of-a-bitch, Chinese lover..."

Jikme ignored them, finished chanting, closed the scripture, put it on his desk, and then politely and obediently greeted the Tibet Army captains, who told Jikme that he must surrender.

Jikme said, "Gentlemen, I need to discuss this with my people. We can negotiate tomorrow."

The Tibetan captains left Jikme's room. One captain said, "Jikme is an unusual man and we should carefully deal with him."

The other captains arrogantly said, "He's afraid of us. Didn't you notice his docile behavior when he saw us?"

The Tibetan captains came the next day and a heated argument ensued. The huge gap between their points of view seemed impossible to bridge. When Jikme gave a signal, several strong men suddenly emerged from the corners and held the Tibetan captains.

The Tibet Army soon learned its negotiating team had met difficulty and began a general offensive against Dondrubling and Norbuling. The Drawu troops fired back. The shooting was from a distance, but a few people were injured. The Tibet Army had better weapons and the Drawu troops couldn't effectively resist, despite

having a hundred Ma Bufang soldiers. The Drawu troop withdrew to the north mountain and the Tibet forces occupied the south.

I was terrified and stayed inside our house all day. The Tibet Army aimlessly fired at our village from top to bottom, their bullets harmlessly falling like hail on village roofs. No one was injured in my village. Children collected half-melted bullets from the yard, the roof, and the road.

At night, all the Bari villagers fled to Dondrubling Village. The Tibet Army moved to our village and set the best two houses on fire. One was the Tsatsa Family home. I saw the black smoke from my home and Uncle's home. The smoke lasted about a week.

The Tibet Army dared not directly enter Dondrubling. They fired shells at Dondrubling Village. The seventh Gyanak Incarnation Lama, Ngakwang Jampal Rinchen, was in Dondrubling. He picked up an unexplored shell and squeezed it while murmuring. Miraculously, Tibet Army bombs were unsuccessful after that. My family stayed in Dondrubling Village for about three months.

Meanwhile, the Tibet Army fired bullets at Norbuling Village from South Mountain, which resulted in one man killed near the river while he was fetching water. Drawu Jikme led his troops to a valley near Norbuling and did not fire unless compelled to fire back. Drawu Jikme's plan was to wait for reinforcements from Ziling.

Norbuling Village had significant status in the Gawa area and thus became the main target of the Tibet Army. They built a defensive station atop South Mountain. After Norbuling Villagers fled to North Mountain, Tibet Army soldiers occupied the village, and burned the Drawu Family and Norbuling Family houses.<sup>9</sup> The rich families' storehouses were full of grain. The smoke continued for about a month. Villagers observed the smoldering houses and the Tibet Army's activity.

A month later, Norbuling Villagers moved to Lungpu Village, then on to the upper part of Lungpu Valley, where they safely spent the entire summer, despite Tibet Army soldiers being only five kilometers away.

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<sup>9</sup> Norbuling was also the name of a rich family in Norbuling Village.

## The Tibet Army is Defeated

Children loved fighting games, but did not like to play negative roles - Tibet Army soldiers. They struggled to act as the company commander of a reinforcement troop nicknamed 'Long Neck', who was Han Chinese or Muslim. Whoever played the role of Tibet Army soldiers had to lose.

When reinforcements arrived, a joint force of Ma Bufang's reinforcements and the local Drawu militia attacked the Tibet Army near Bumda Monastery, led by the company commander, Long Neck. The Tibet army's mortar shells were unsuccessful and Ma Bufang's Army inflicted a crushing defeat on the Tibet Army soldiers, who fled, wailed, and died. Tibet Army soldiers fired back while they were retreating and yelled, "Shoot Chinese heads!" and cursed local Tibetans for being Chinese lovers. The alliance troops returned in triumph with many captives.

Bumda Monastery monks and Bumda villagers came to the battlefield after the Tibet Army fled and collected weapons, gold rings, and religious objects from corpses. The village also adopted some injured Tibetan soldiers.

In Norbuling, some aggressive young men encouraged each other to attack the Tibet Army soldiers on South Mountain. Jikme said, "Don't take risks. We don't want someone to die."

Later, the alliance troops chased the Tibet Army out of Nangchen Territory.

Norbuling Villagers then returned home to find tall grass growing in every village corner. Villagers curiously gathered around the ruins of the two burned houses. These big three-story houses were made of stone and the walls had resisted the fire. The houses looked complete from a distance. One of the burned houses belonged to the Norbuling Family. The floors had collapsed, leaving a pile of dirt inside the wall. People dug out much burned barley. Deep inside, the barley was still smoldering.

When my family returned to Bari Village, I gloomily looked at the ruins of our burned house. The first and second floors had resisted the fire, but Uncle's house was completely burned. We shared our house's two floors for some time. I pondered how the two rooms

escaped the fire. My parents indicated the reason: I raised my head and saw a talisman hung from the ceiling, swaying in the breeze. I then understood why my parents kept it and did not let me touch it. This talisman was from Tsatsa Jampa Dargye, Grandmother's brother, and a devoted monk at Dondrubling Monastery. He had made great achievement and become very venerable.

One day, he called his two nephews to his home and said, "Give my medical kit to the Upper Tsatsa Family. You will become a doctor and help people." He gave a bag to Uncle, took off his talisman, gave it to Father, and said, "You won't be a doctor in this life. Keep this amulet and my skull after I die. They will be useful." He pointed at the wall and said, "When the sunlight shines here, I will go."

Father and Uncle did not quite understand what he meant. When they got downstairs, they heard a strong incantation "*hung*" from his room. Father and Uncle immediately went back and saw their uncle wearing a religious hat and meditating. They realized he was not breathing and completely inanimate. Noticing sunlight striking the wall at the place he had marked, they knew he was dead.

According to tradition, a person who dies in a meditation posture should be cremated. As Jampa Dargye's corpse was being cremated, his head exploded and his skull bounded out of the crematory. Father took it as family treasure and kept it in a box. He put the talisman up on the ceiling. When I curiously tried to touch it, Father would not let me do so. I then understood why the rooms had not burned.

The Ma Bufang Army selected some Tibet Army captains and beheaded them, except for one captain who jerked his head down and the knife passed over it. Thinking he was an unusually lucky person, Ma's soldiers released him.

Drawu Jikme requested leniency for the other captives and the Ma Bufang Army agreed. The captives stayed in local homes and then Drawu released them all and gave them plenty of provisions for their journey back to their homes. Many injured Tibetan soldiers were not ready to go home and stayed with locals. Later, some married local women and became local people.

Uncle safely returned to his home in Patang. Word of his heroism spread his name throughout the Gawa Area. He had performed an immortal feat for the Drawu people. When he heard that he was going to be rewarded by the Ma Bufang Army, he decided that it was time to seize this opportunity to improve his life. He thought about it and when he was asked, "What do you want for a meritorious prize?" he replied, "I want a piece of land shaped like a robe."

The officials did not understand and agreed.

When Uncle then requested a big piece of the best land in Patang, they thought his desire was excessive, and said, "This is not what you requested."

Uncle explained, "Shorle, Bumda, and Zitsa valleys are joined together like a robe."

The Ma Bufang Army representatives were speechless and gave him the land he had requested.

This land improved Uncle's life. The number of his livestock rapidly increased, thanks to the land's nutritious grass. Uncle had nine sons and three daughters. Uncle's family continued prospering as his children grew older.

### Consulting a Deity

We stayed in Dondrubling Village during the time of the Tibet Army invasion. It was an interesting place. The Tsatsa Family's two houses had to be rebuilt. It was an opportunity to move on. Father hesitated to move to Dondrubling without a prior divination and consulted a fortune-teller named Getse. Father and Uncle asked, "What if we move to Dondrubling Village?"

Getse prepared to divine as incense wafted through the air. A *mandala* was on the table. A copper mirror leaned against the *mandala*, facing him. Getse murmured with half-closed eyes, sprinkled barley on the mirror, opened his eyes wide, and said, "I saw two sheep chased by a white man riding a white horse with a rope, racing down a slope. Finally, he caught the two sheep and took them back to the mountain."

Father asked, "What does it mean?"

Getse said, "It means Bari Mountain Deity does not want your families to leave, because the Tsatsa Family was the first resident in Bari Village. Something bad will surely befall your families if you leave."

Father asked, "What if we stay in Bari Village?"

Getse murmured, read the mirror, and said, "I saw a beautiful green valley, clouds wafting up the mountain, rosy morning sunbeams flashing across a bright blue patch of sky, and a fruit tree shining in the center of the valley. Hanging fruit made the branches sag as they swayed in the breeze. A few insects nested in its roots. You can sacrifice something to cure this little problem."

Father trusted the fortune-teller, but Uncle was full of contradictory thoughts and hesitated. Finally, he made a decision to move and then felt guilty, but obstinately stuck to this decision, despite Father's persuasions to trust the divination.

Uncle did not have pleasant dreams in Dondrubling Village where, as we expected, unfortunate things frequently befell him. After he died, his three daughters died and his wife broke her leg. It all happened within ten years. My family stayed in Bari Village and prospered without major mishap until the Dege militia came to Dondrubling in the 1940s.



# SAMDRUBCHO

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Samdrubcho (1935-2002) of Norbuling Village gave accounts of local tribal opposition to the Drawu Chief in the 1940s. The narrator lived in Nepal for three decades and returned to Norbuling Village in the 1990s. He died in a traffic accident in Dondrubling in 2002.

## Five Tribes Against Drawu

I was born in the 1930s in the small village of Norbuling in the Gawa Area. I was born in the wrong era. I experienced war, imprisonment, starvation, illness, and death. I barely survived these calamities. I lost my family. Later, I established a new family. These tragic, memorable experiences made me mature and stronger. My previous life's karma explains the inevitable consequences in this life.

The conflict between five tribes in the Nangchen Kingdom took place in the 1940s. It was a significant local historical event, but few people remember it. With time, the event has faded from people's mind, however, this event deeply impacted some people, despite it paling in comparison to later calamities.

The Nangchen King was a symbolic position with no real power. Eventually, Drawu was the center of the Kingdom. Many chiefs in the Nangchen Kingdom disliked Drawu, partly because they were jealous of his achievements. Galuk, a vagrant from Dartsemdo, He found a job as translator. He played a role as an intermediary between Drawu's opponents. Hashul, Rashul, Jezang, and Rinpo were convinced by Galuk's persuasive arguments. These chiefs shared the common interests that outweighed their differences. Galuk advanced in his relationship with the Chinese through his language abilities. Drawu's opponents were hoping that Galuk would manipulate the Chinese to the point they would then give them their support. Consequently, the federation of five chiefs plotted to eliminate



Drawu. Galuk and the five chiefs discussed their plan with the Chinese, who refused to join their federation and warned that this was a very risky venture.

The Five Chief Federation against Drawu was a common topic throughout Gawa. Periodically, we heard news about the Anti-Drawu Federation Army recruiting soldiers and organizing dare-to-die teams. All the Drawu people were intimidated by the odds of five against one, in addition to various rumors that circulated, suggesting a bad end for Drawu and his followers.

The Drawu Chief sent an emergency appeal to Ziling for help and then desperately waited for reinforcements. Would Ziling send reinforcements? Could reinforcements reach Dondrubling before the enemy waged an offensive? The uncertainty led Drawu to try any possibility that might improve his situation. Most villages did not engage in further preparation. Village daily life continued as usual. Dondrubling and Norbuling were the headquarters of Drawu and were targets of the Five Chief Federation. An ominous atmosphere permeated the two villages.

The Drawu Chief held a meeting at Norbuling Village and said, "To create a harmonious relationship with the five chiefs, I have tried whatever I could. I arranged for my daughter to marry one chief. I have never tried to harm them. I am innocent." His speech was sympathetically received by his villagers and many men spontaneously agreed to guard Drawu Chief's house day and night.

Later, Dondrubling and Norbuling residents moved their property into Dondrubling Monastery and claimed that this was to protect the monastery. I was puzzled. Who was protecting whom? As was the usual case when facing invaders, Dondrubling Monastery became the first shelter.

### Reinforcement Troops From Ziling

News of the appeal for reinforcements from Ziling was heard throughout Gawa and was of great concern to the Drawu Chief's opponents. In order to create a false impression and mislead his opponents, the Drawu Chief ordered Dondrubling and Norbuling Villagers to pitch tents near Dondrubling and pile wood sticks in front

of each tent to resemble rifles. Man who had rifles did sentry duty on the mountains around Dondrubling. The Drawu Chief also announced that reinforcements had already reached Dondrubling. Though untrue, this announcement likely misled Drawu's opponents until 500 reinforcements reached Dondrubling.

The commander's wife was a very pretty daughter of the Norbuling Family. She had married a Ma Bufang Army commander that local called 'Big Ziling'. This marriage was arranged by the Drawu Chief and indicated how sophisticated he was. She knew that she would never return to her home place and her homesickness created fervent emotion toward Gawa. Gawa caravaners in Ziling appreciated her enthusiastic hospitality and her assistance. Ziling people avoided conflict with Gawa native and those from nearby areas because they were the favorites of the commander's wife and her husband always tried to meet her requests.

To send 500 soldiers to Gawa for war was not an easy decision. The commander's wife did not hesitate when facing difficulty and tried as hard as she could. Would the appeal for reinforcements have been approved without her persuasion?

A regimental unit of 500 cavalymen guided by a 'red hat' commander marched toward Gawa. Ziling residents called Gawa people 'Red Hats', because a red tassel decorated their hats. The 'red hat' commander was originally from Zhewundo.

When they reached the banks of the Yangtze River, several men wearing red woolen robes shot at the troops from a hilltop. The bullets were shot from so far away that they were harmless. The Chinese soldiers fired back and pursued the attackers. The red robed men disappeared from the hilltop. When the Chinese reached the hilltop, there was nobody there. They only heard melodious religious chanting accompanied by drumming from a nearby monastery. The 500 soldiers rushed to the monastery hall. The monks were astonished by these sudden, uninvited visitors. The soldiers ruthlessly pulled old and young monks from their seats, and searched every room in the monastery, but found nobody, except old hermits. They interrogated all the monks and found nothing.

Still suspicious of monastery involvement, the soldiers detained everyone, including innocents. Monks were forced to gather

in the monastery courtyard in a rushed manner. Many didn't even have a chance to put on their boots, or the soldiers did not let them. With gun muzzles pointing at them, 200 monks stood in line and left for Dondrubling. Everything stopped in the monastery except for the flickering of hundreds of butter lamps. Soldiers escorted the group of barefoot monks along the river. Many villagers painfully witnessed this, but dared not take action.

The news reached the Drawu Chief before the soldiers arrived in Norbuling Village. Drawu prepared welcome liquor for the reinforcements. As they entered Norbuling Village, those standing along the road, realizing the monks were barefoot, immediately removed their boots and gave them to the monks.

The reinforcements were regarded as rescuers, but their behavior disappointed everyone. The Drawu Chief went out of the village gate, politely offered liquor and white scarves to the reinforcements, and asked the soldiers to release the monks. The soldiers complained that the monks had provoked them. The Drawu Chief guaranteed that the monks were innocent. The Ma Bufang Soldiers then released them all.

The 500 soldiers marched to Drawu's rival area, where they behaved like criminals, killing and raping many. Their actions gave survivors nightmares for a generation. They also captured Galuk and the other leaders. I heard that Drawu Jikme asked the army captain not to execute the enemies. However, Galuk was beheaded in public. This ended the Five Tribes' opposition to the Drawu Chief.

# CHODRON: TWO

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Chodron (1920s-2010) of Bari Village was the oldest member of the Tsatsa Family when I visited her. Her accounts of the early twentieth century were made with great clarity and detail. She witnessed the Tibet Army invasion and the war between Drawu and Dege. She gave accounts of her uncle, Jangtsang Awo, and her family history. Chodron, Lhakpa Wangmo's father, Rinchen, and Tsering Sonam's father are cousins.

## The Dege-Drawu Conflict

The Nangchen Kingdom neighbored the Dege Kingdom, which had thirty tribes in four districts. The tribal leader was a *demko*.<sup>10</sup> District leaders were called *nyerchen*<sup>11</sup> 'governor'. The Nangchen Kingdom had twenty-five tribes. Each tribal leader was called *baihu*, a Chinese term meaning 'leader of a hundred households'. Drawu was the most powerful *baihu*.

The thirty *demko* symbolized the thirty generals of King Gesar.<sup>12</sup> Jago Tobdan, Denadruk, Jokham Genam, and Omi Rinam were the four governors. Each *nyerchen* had a piece of yellow silk tied to their belts and each was followed by seven bodyguards. In contrast, each *demko* had only one bodyguard.

The Dege King had a long family lineage traceable to the time of the Tibetan Empire. After the King died, Jago Tobdan gained influence. His name, Jago Tobdan 'Powerful Vulture', matched the reality.

The conflict between Drawu and Dege started between the Jushul and Drenbeb families. The Jushul Family was a *demko*. The Drenbeb Family was a *demko* and very rich. The Drenbeb Family

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<sup>10</sup> *demko* = one placed in an appointed position.

<sup>11</sup> *nyerchen* = general manager.

<sup>12</sup> King Gesar = legendary hero.

borrowed a piece of land from the Jushul Family. Years passed and the issue of a land contract seemed to fade after the head of the Jushul Family died. However, Jushul Jikme Trinley never forgot that his father had lent a piece of land to the Drenbeb Family. He became a physical giant of a man as he matured and his desire to reclaim his land intensified.

Jikme Trinley was handsome and aggressive. Other *demko* feared him. Jago Tobdan considered him a potential rival. According to some accounts, when Jikme Trinley met Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo, the most famous lama in the twentieth century, the lama put his hand on Jikme Trinley's head and prayed, "I wish you will grow no more than this." The lama's prayer limited his ability. Still, a short person could walk under the sword crossed horizontally in his sash.

Jushul Jikme Trinley, deciding it was time to take back his land, negotiated with Drenbeb Lhagyal but nothing came of it, except both sides agreed to ask Jago Tobdan for arbitration. Jago Tobdan arbitrated prejudicially, disappointing Jushul Jikme Trinley. His pleasant dream was extinguished by Drenbeb Lhagyal and Jago Tobdan. He was a powerful man and hated such unfair treatment. He vowed to take revenge.

Jushul Jikme Trinley had twenty loyal men who prepared to attack Drenbeb Lhagyal and looked for an opportunity to attack clandestinely. When Jushul Jikme Trinley knew Drenbeb Lhagyal and his soldiers were on the way to Jago Tobden's home, he said to his men, "A great time is coming. I know weapons can't pierce his skin and my skin. Dealing with Drenbeb Lhagyal is my responsibility. Lie in ambush in the forest by the road and shoot his men."

As Drenbeb Lhagyal's group approached, Jushul Jikme Trinley stood in the middle of the road holding a rifle horizontally. This brave, fearless giant was truly imposing, reducing any opponent's morale. Drenbeb Lhagyal was also heavily armed with a bullet sash tied around his upper body, a pistol and knife in his sash, and a rifle across his back. The two leaders began cursing each other. Drenbeb Lhagyal and his men got ready to fire, but it was too late. Jikme Trinley gave a simple signal and his men fired. Drenbeb Lhagyal's followers wailed, died, and fled. Drenbeb Lhagyal was fine, despite being shot at. Jikme Trinley had heard that only his own

weapon could hurt him. He then aimed carefully at Drenbeb Lhagyal's bullet sash and fired. The bullets exploded, wounding Drenbeb Lhagyal.

Jikme Trinley's sixteen-year-old son charged out of the forest, raised his sword at Drenbeb Lhagyal, and in a foaming rage shouted, "I am taking revenge for our land!"

Drenbeb Lhagyal fired his rifle and this pathetic, impulsive teenager collapsed to the ground, a bullet through his forehead.

Pride and sadness rose in Jikme Trinley's heart. He had lost one of his two sons. Still, it was a glorious death. He walked past his dead son, approached Drenbeb Lhagyal, and beat his head with a stone until he was dead. He had achieved his goal but at a high price. An uncertain future awaited him. Could he really get his land back?

There was a huge gap between Jikme Trinley's plan and reality. Not only could he not retrieve his land, but his sloppy and impulsive decision created future disaster. He had heard that Jago Tobdan was trying to capture him. Facing such a strong opponent, he decided to leave the Dege Kingdom. When he asked who would follow him, only a few of his people agreed. Jikme Trinley and his followers then reluctantly left their village. To increase the chances of a successful escape, they divided into two groups. One went toward Gawa and the other entered the Nyakrong Area, south of Dege. Jago Tobdan's troops pursued Jikme Trinley and his followers.

Jikme Trinley cursed Jago Tobdan for forcing him to leave his home place and said to his followers, "You go ahead. I will join you later."

As Jikme Trinley and a servant were crossing a river. Jikme Trinley suddenly stopped and cried out before reaching the bank.

When his servant asked him if he was OK, he said, "My leg is broken. I can't move."

The frightened servant's face became pale and howled, "What can I do? What can I do?"

Jikme Trinley said, "Don't worry. Find Jago Tobdan and describe my situation. I feel very guilty about what I've done. I would like to surrender to him. If he refuses, I hope I can meet him here. If he still refuses my request, please tell him to send his general here."

The shocked servant said, "They will kill you. Please let me carry you." After Jikme Trinley insisted, the servant found Jago Tobdan and delivered the message.

Bachu, Jago Tobdan's general, said, "Don't meet him. I'll bring him back."

Jago Tobdan said, "No, you don't need to go. I don't think Jikme Trinley's legs are that fragile. It is a plot. If we send an army for one person, we will be laughed at. Send two of your men, and then we will learn his true plan."

Two men then rode horses to the river and saw Jikme Trinley's upper body above the surface of the water. Jikme Trinley suddenly, stood up, slashed them both with a single sword stroke, and said, "It's so difficult to meet Jago Tobdan. I'm disappointed by such visitors. They are not his general."

Jago Tobdan had discerned his motivation and Jikme Trinley's trick failed. With no hope left, he felt he was a complete failure in Dege. However, new places and new people are always an opportunity to start a new life. Craving a new beginning, he led his few followers to Dondrubling and appealed to Drawu for shelter. This request was granted.

Jikme Trinley lived in Dondrubling and people could not imagine that he was violent from his docile behavior, despite his background.

Jago Tobdan didn't understand why Drawu accepted his enemy. Thinking Drawu's motivation was to undermine him, he wanted to send troops, but did not, thinking Drawu was protected by the Ma Bufang Army.

Under Ziling's protection, the Tibet Army had been defeated. Dege and Nangchen were related by marriage and had a harmonious relationship. Drawu had no potential dangers from his neighbors.

Ma Bufang ordered the Nangchen Kingdom to pay a thousand horses as tax. Drawu organized a big caravan to Ziling to carry out this task. Unexpectedly, Ma Bufang was replaced by the Communists. The thousand horses then became a perfect gift to the new, powerful government. Drawu was highly complemented by the Communists for his patriotic gift.

A captain was named as a special commissioner and dispatched by the Communists to direct the Ma Bufang Army in Gawa.

After a half-decade, this affair had not faded from Jago Tobdan's mind. He sent a spy to Gawa who reported all about Jushul Jikme Trinley, Ma Bufang, and Drawu.

Jago Tobdan concluded that, since Ma Bufang had been defeated, Drawu had lost his protector and it was the right time to capture Jushul Jikme Trinley. His plan was encouraged by some aggressive young men. Jago Tobdan organized about 300 selected soldiers, which made him confident. He insisted on this decision, despite some advisors suggesting that this plan would be dangerous for the soldiers, harm the relationship with Drawu, and have unpredictable consequences.

Jago Tobdan's army marched toward Gawa, crossed the Yangtze River, went along the southern bank, reached Traleb Village, and met a family with nine sons. This family was originally from Chamdo. Harboring grand dreams and craving opportunity, the nine sons were excited by the troop's arrival and joined them. The youngest son guided the army to Patang, where they camped, readied their weapons, ate holy objects to protect them from death, and offered incense to the war deities.

Bonchen Baihu, one of the twenty-five *baihu*, expected disaster to befall both sides. He came to the Dege camp and suggested that negotiation was the best solution. The Dege people hesitated. An old captain said, "It is a good idea. How can we negotiate?"

This conversation was interrupted by Bachu, a Dege Army captain, who said, "Negotiation! We will capture Drawu Jikme and Jushul Jikme Trinley."

Bachu was a huge man adorned by leonine hair that emphasized his strength. His movements and behavior accentuated his lofty mettle, which was further strengthened by his accounts of having killed eighteen cavalymen. After a silence, Karma Trinley, Bonchen Baihu's oldest son, said, "I'd like to be the contact person if negotiation is possible." Finally, they reluctantly agreed.

Early the next morning, Bachu and a few captains crossed Dondrubling, and came to Norbuling without anyone realizing their



true identity. They directly entered Drawu Jikme's living room. Drawu Jikme was on the bed and had no bodyguards. It was an opportunity for Bachu, but he was not the man they had expected. Drawu Jikme's right hand was in his robe. It seemed he was holding a pistol. His bearing and magnificent appearance overwhelmed the arrivals and reduced their morale. Dege people dared not force him.

Bachu then pounded the table and shouted, "Where is Jushul Jikme Trinley? I want him now." There was a huge distance between what Bachu said and thought. He now only wanted Jushul 'jigs med, not Drawu Jikme.

Drawu Jikme quietly said, "There is a misunderstanding. Ma Bufang's Army accepted him, not me."

When he heard the noise in Drawu Jikme's living room, Tenyak, a Norbuling Villager leader, was in the kitchen. He entered the room, and then more men came. Both sides aimed their guns at each other. It seemed something terrible would happen. Drawu Jikme and Karma Trinley persuaded them to lower their weapons and urged reconciliation in this deadlocked negotiation.

Drawu Jikme showed a positive attitude toward negotiation and said, "I will arrange a meeting with Jushul Jikme Trinley." Bachu did not believe this until Drawu Jikme swore to keep his promise.

Drawu Jikme said, "The special commissioner is the current Chinese leader. He can decide if Jushul Jikme Trinley should be given to you."

Karma Trinley said, "I can speak Chinese. I would like to be the translator."

They then settled the time and the Dege people left.

The next day, Bachu said to the other captains, "Drawu Jikme is afraid of us. If he doesn't want to give Jushul Jikme Trinley to us, I will capture them both." Bachu was a physically strong, but brainless man, and rejected the other captains' advice. He commanded the Dege troop to march near Dondrubling and get ready to attack.

Bachu and several captains went to Drawu's home to negotiate. The home had now been carefully arranged. In one large room, cloth was hung on the wall, sweet incense wafted through the air, and mutton, yogurt, and cheese cakes covered a long narrow Tibetan-style table. Drawu's enthusiastic hospitality did not

completely satisfy the guests, but blunted their suspicions. Some Chinese people also were in attendance. Dege captains sat crossed-leg on a carpet.

Bachu bellowed, "Where is Jushul Jikme Trinley?"

Just after he finished shouting, Jushul 'jigs med appeared, dressed in a new *bure* 'coarsely woven cotton cloth' shirt and very baggy silk trousers. He crossed the corridor and approached, holding a copper tea kettle. This handsome giant was the man they wanted. Every person in Dege knew him. The hundreds of elite Dege soldiers had suffered much, all on account of this man.

When these former friends met, unpleasant emotion became visible on Bachu and his companions' faces. Jushul Jikme Trinley controlled himself and pleasantly said, "How are you? Old friend, please have some tea." He bent down and poured tea into their bowls and then suddenly grabbed the curtain and yanked it. A dozen men appeared behind the curtain and jumped on the Dege captains. Every three men struggled with one Dege captain.

Although Bachu was strong, he and his companions were subdued and pushed out of the luxurious guest room. Bachu scolded, "Drawu Jikme is a fox, a son-of-bitch."

Simultaneously, Dege troops were attacked by the Drawu Army and the Chinese Army at Dondrubling along several routes: the Norbuling Army on East Mountain, the Dondrubling Army on West Mountain, and by the Chinese in the middle. The Dege Army tried to flee south, but the Patang Army blocked the way. The entire Dege Army was overwhelmed.

Kunga Zangpo's account about Dege's casualties differs from Chodron's. Kunga Zangpo said that Drawu Jikme told his men to let the defeated Dege militias escape and the Patang people did not completely block the road. After the Ma Bufang army waged an offensive, around thirty people were gunned down, but most of the thirty only pretended to be dead. They signaled each other to see who was alive and fled under the cover of darkness that night. The next morning, there were only seven corpses.

## Chodron Gives an Eyewitness Account

I was in Bari, south of Dondrubling Village. The Dege Army had to pass through our village. My family and fellow villagers were terrified by the Dege militia. Dege soldiers camped near my village. I told my son to stay inside the house. That evening, I peered through the window at the Dege camp with a throbbing heart. I saw several dozen cavalymen coming along the road toward my home. They were bigger and taller than our men. They took the rifles slung over their backs, and used the *ru*<sup>13</sup> to pull down dried grass stored on the walls and roofs of houses for their horses. The villagers stayed quietly inside their homes, hoping the Dege soldiers would not knock on their doors. They neither provoked nor humiliated anyone. After they obtained a lot of hay, they left for their camp. I was utterly terrified. I did not dare fetch water from a river near my house. I timidly stayed and endured this worrisome time.

The next day, the Dege Army positioned troops in the family kitchen gardens, in fields, behind walls, and near the river in case negotiation failed. That afternoon, I heard firing and shouting. In the evening, the Dege Army desperately fled south and passed by my home. The Chinese and the Drawu forces were pursuing them. I prayed they would safely pass through the narrow valley to Patang so they would have a better chance of escaping. Patang soldiers blocked the way and many were killed. I heard only two soldiers were released to send information to Jago Tobdan.

The Drawu Army returned in triumph. Ten soldiers stayed in every home in Bari. The villagers provided tea. I did not like those soldiers. They described how timid the Dege Army was. I was not interested in their conversation. The next day, many Dondrubling and Bari villagers went to the battlefield to collect valuables. My neighbors suggested I also go, but I refused. I didn't even want to look in that direction. My son brought some cartridge cases home. I scolded him and told him to throw them into the river or bury them.

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<sup>13</sup> A *ru* is a stick with a fork at the top pivots around a screw. A rifle end is placed in the fork for better accuracy.

The battlefield was near my fields. I didn't dare go there to work for two years.

This nightmare so bothered me that I had sleepless nights, little appetite, and often panted. I was sick and saw a doctor, but it was not helpful. I invited monks and that was also not helpful. I was disappointed with Drawu Jikme. I thought that he would go directly to Hell but, unexpectedly, he died peacefully while he was meditating. My sickness had completely faded away by the time the entire village fled from the Red Chinese in 1958.

After the Drawu and Dege event, we all expected Drawu and Dege would fight. Jago Tobdan would not resign himself to defeat, recruited and trained men, and announced that he would take revenge for Drawu killing his followers. This hatred between Drawu and Dege faded when PLA troops were stationed throughout both areas. They were destined to face the same enemy and fight side by side. Old grievances followed Jago Tobdan and Drawu Rinchen Tsering (b. 1930), the son of Drawu Jikme, after they fled to India. Under the new circumstances, the Dege-Drawu problem was ridiculous and embarrassing. They finally became sworn friends through the Dalai Lama's mediation.



# CHOYING DORJE

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Choying Dorje (b. 1956) of Patang, a grandson of Jangtsang Awo, lived for years with Uncle Butruk, a son of Jangtsang Awo. He provided accounts about Jangtsang Awo and Uncle Butruk. Lhakpa Wangmo, Rinchen, Tsering Sonam, and Choying Dorje are cousins.

**M**y father's family name was Jangtsang. My paternal grandfather's name was Jangtsang Awo. My paternal grandmother's family name was Khashul. I remember my grandparents. Grandfather Jangtsang Awo had thirteen children. Caring for his family was a harsh reality that compelled him to hunt. Hiking in the mountains and looking for musk deer were his daily activities. He carried a rifle across his shoulders and wore out his robe. He sewed patches on it again and again until it eventually became a nice shoulder cover. Grandfather not only hunted, but also was devoted to Tara 'Mother of Liberation'. He almost never stopped chanting Tara-related religious formulations, which affected his life. I heard various stories about Grandfather:

## A Rolling Boulder

One day while Grandfather was climbing a mountain, a boulder suddenly rolled straight at him. Realizing there was no way to escape from the narrow valley slope he was on, he chose to die without seeing the rolling boulder. He looked downslope, held his rifle against his body vertically, closed his eyes, and chanted a Tara scripture. Hearing the tumbling boulder, feeling death coming, he felt air pass around his body with the sound of thunder. As he waited, he heard and felt the rolling boulder pass by. He looked round and found the boulder had broken into pieces just before reaching him.

## Encountering a Ghost

A tornado swirled through the meadow. Yak dung, grass, and dust tumbled around and approached Grandfather as he reached Khyungchen Valley. His horse was shocked. Knowing it was an ominous sign, Grandfather aimed his rifle at the tornado, which crossed the Khyungchen River to a red boulder, and disappeared.

He saw an old lady he had never before seen. Massive gray hair hid her face. Frightened eyes peered at him. He was astonished. His horse jumped and neighed and he nearly fell off. He shouted to the old lady, "Go away, I can't control my horse."

She said nothing. The horse wouldn't go forward. He had to take another route to his destination. After some distance, Grandfather looked back at the red boulder. The old lady was still there. Later, he heard that a ghost lived there.

## Renouncing Hunting

One day, Grandfather was hunting around a mountain and noticed a musk deer. He set his rifle firmly on its *ru* and aimed, but then realized it was not a musk deer but a female blue goat. He peered again. It was a musk deer. He thought it was his mistake and aimed again, but this time it was a female *tsewo*<sup>14</sup> goat. He hesitated and gave up.

Grandfather visited the sixth Gyanak Incarnation Ngakwang Jampal Rinchen, and reported this incident. Ngakwang Jampal Rinchen explained that it was a vision of the deity, Tara. "You better stop hunting. I can promise you that your life won't be worse," he said.

Grandfather felt proud and happy to have had a Tara vision. He was deeply affected by the vision and the lama's instruction. He destroyed his rifle in front of the lama and swore that he would never hunt again, though his family's life largely depended on it.

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<sup>14</sup> *Tsewo/tsetar* is to free or save the life of an animal destined for slaughter. This might be done by purchasing the animals and then setting them free, or in the case of a privately owned animal, attaching a piece of cloth to its ear, designating that it is a *tsewo*.

## A Mountain Deity Kidnaps Grandfather's Servant

After Grandfather was awarded a big piece of land from the local chief, the Jangtsang Family gradually became rich and could afford to hire servants. Grandfather hired a man from Nangchen to care for his livestock. After this servant accidentally killed a wolf on Bul Mountain, he mysteriously disappeared. At that time, he had worked for Grandfather for a few years. Grandfather hiked from valley to valley and mountain to mountain seeking the lost servant, as if he were looking for a musk deer. Thinking that a supernatural creature might have kidnapped him, Grandfather invited monks to his home, but this also was not helpful.

Believing that *anye*<sup>15</sup> would be more effective than monks in dealing with supernatural entities, he invited a famous *anye* from Pacha Monastery, who said, "Your servant was seized by a mountain deity." He then chanted mantras, offered *sang*,<sup>16</sup> and blew the *kangling*.<sup>17</sup>

The next day, the servant was discovered behind Grandfather's tent. He was pale-faced, breathing heavily, and utterly exhausted. After he recovered, he narrated:

I was rolling rocks down the mountain for fun as a pack of wolves was crossing the mountain. A rock hit one wolf, which then rolled with the rock, away from his pack. Surely, the wolf was killed. I didn't know when, but a man was suddenly there, standing by me. He grabbed me. He milked a rabbit into a wooden bowl and forced me to drink the milk, which made me lose the ability to speak. This milk was amazing food, which I had never had before. I was neither hungry nor thirsty for all those days. This man scolded, "Bring back my dog!" I was then lifted by his powerful hand. He took me across the shrub-covered slope to look for his wolf. It was like we were flying. I did this over and over. I didn't find the wolf, but smelled the *sang* and heard the *kangling*. He then brought me back home at great speed. The air swiftly passed by my ears. Everything ended when you woke me.

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<sup>15</sup> *Anye* is an alternative term for *ngakpa*, a non-monastic tantric practitioner.

<sup>16</sup> *Bsang* = a smoke offering.

<sup>17</sup> *Kangling* = a trumpet made of a human femoral.



The *anye* gave the servant an amulet and Grandfather gave him a rifle. He safely herded Grandfather's livestock for some months until one day, he again did not return. Grandfather invited the same *anye*, who performed rituals, and the servant was again released. Grandfather was afraid of his servant being kidnapped again, so he ordered him to stop herding and stay at home.

One day, the servant took off the amulet, put it on the adobe stove, hung the rifle on the pole, and went outside to the toilet. He was walking subconsciously far from the tent when he looked back at the tent and realized what he was doing. He had been abducted again.

The same *anye* brought him back from the mountain deity and said, "The mountain deity now has the habit of abducting him. The more times he is grabbed, the less opportunity I have to bring him back. He had better go to Nangchen."

Grandfather then sent him to Nangchen.

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Mountain deities were not only interested in Tibetans, they were also interested in Chinese. Let me tell you another story:

A demobilized Chinese soldier from the Ma Bufang Army was a skilled carpenter who married a local woman in Bari Village. One day, his neighbor hired him to rebuild their house. The carpenter forgot his saw and returned home to get it, and then did not return.

When the neighbor went to his home and asked his wife where her husband was, she said, "I don't know. He didn't come home today."

Chinese men often abandoned their wives and children. The carpenter's wife and neighbors wondered if he had done the same, although there was no indication he would have done so. They visited the sixth Incarnation Gyanak Lama Ngakwang Jampal Rinchen, and reported the incident. The lama said, "Do a *rindro*<sup>18</sup> ritual and chant the *semcho* 'mantra' a hundred thousand times."

Three days later, some old ladies found the carpenter in a hole near the Yangtze River and sent to Dondrubling. His family sent two riders there. He had lost the ability to speak. Gyanak Lama Ngakwang

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<sup>18</sup> *rindro* = a healing ritual.

Jampal Rinchen held a ritual of the purification of imperfections and sprinkled him with sacred water.

The carpenter gradually recovered and recalled:

Two strangers grabbed me when I was on my way home. One had red hair. When we reached the bank of the Jachu River in Dondrubling Village, a Horba<sup>19</sup> man was moistening a dry yak skin in the river. He passed by me, nearly trampling me. He didn't see me, or else didn't notice me. I wanted to shout, but I could not. It was like a dream. I was sober. We continued to Rala Mountain Pass. I saw the muddy Yangtze River water sluggishly flowing silently eastward through the deep gorge. Expecting my ultimate destiny would be entombment in the Yangtze River, I was hopelessly sad. We went down the slope toward the river. I saw uncomfortable expressions on their faces. One said, "They won't stop provoking us so let's release him," and then they did.

Like Grandfather's servant, the Chinese carpenter had a second experience of being kidnapped. One day, he and his daughter were plowing a field near the place where corpses were disposed of. Suddenly, he stopped plowing and raced up a slope with his arms raised, as if he was surrendering.

His daughter shouted, "Father! Father!"

He then fell to the ground and was unable to speak.

Gyanak Lama Ngakwang Jampal Rinchen cured him again.

The Chinese carpenter said, "My arms were held by two riders and I was sandwiched between galloping horses. When I heard my daughter shouting, they released me. They were the same two men who abducted me earlier."

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<sup>19</sup> Horba = Tibetans from Karmdze and Dramgo counties.

## Grandfather Fights the Tibet Army

When Grandfather was young, the Tibet government in Lhasa wanted to consolidate the entire Tibetan area, but local regimes resisted. When the Tibet Army reached Borokala Mountain between Patang and Rashul, Grandfather and one of his relatives held them back on the way to Dondrubling for a half-day. Finally, they were captured after their bullets were spent.

The Drawu Chief then sent a message to the Tibet Army that if they harmed the two men, he would take revenge. Meanwhile, the Tibet Army chiefs admired them and wanted to keep these two new prisoners as soldiers, but the two men refused. Finally, the Tibet Army released Grandfather and his relative and gave them horses and weapons.

Grandfather's relative was also his wife's cousin. The relationship between the two families was good. Both families herded and lived in Patang. Grandmother delivered eighteen babies of whom three daughters and nine sons lived past childhood. Grandfather had a hard time finding food and clothes for twelve children. He hunted musk deer and blue sheep. At that time, there were many wild animals in the nearby mountains. Grandfather fed his children with wild animal meat and made robes for his children out of wild animal skins.

### Uncle Butruk<sup>20</sup>

Uncle Butruk (1905-1985) was a one-armed monk at Dondrubling Monastery. A tangle of deep scars covered his face and head. Implausibly, he was one of three of the nine sons of the Jangtsang Family who died naturally. His fierce appearance was caused by a serious incident that had occurred when he was a young monk. His physical deformity reflected inwardly, creating a gentle, quiet human being. He lacked the ability to hold weapons during the war, and was ignored or pitied during the Cultural Revolution. He placidly endured

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<sup>20</sup> Accounts of Uncle Butruk's life differed slightly among the narrators. Chojo, a Dondrubling Monastery monk, as well as Mother's cousin, lived with Uncle Butruk for many years, therefore, his account may be the most reliable.

all the calamities and died serenely in 1985 when he was more than eighty.

When Uncle Butruk was young, he and his brothers became monks and lived together at Dondrubling Monastery, where an aggressive *dobdob*<sup>21</sup> often provoked other monks, hoping they would fight him.

Uncle Butruk's father, Jangtsang Awo, was a well-known hero. The *dobdob* was particularly keen on challenging the son of the hero, Uncle Butruk, and his brother. But the sons of this hero were passive monks and ignored the *dobdob's* provocations. The *dobdob* could find no excuse and waited for an appropriate time. Uncle Butruk and his brother disliked this monk disturbing them but, in order to be considered good monks, they tolerated his abuse.

Once the *dobdob* followed a caravan to Lhasa. His arduous trek was unsuccessful because he encountered five bandits. When his companions suggested recovering the looted property, he said, "Fifty loaded yaks are nothing compared to life. Forget it," and they returned empty-handed.

Uncle Butruk intentionally satirized, "It could not be true. He is a real *dobdob*. A hero like him! How is it possible for bandits to loot fifty loaded yaks."

Immediately provoked, blood engorged the *dobdob's* face, turning it ruddy. Hissing like a snake teased with a stick, he angrily said, "Tonight we will see who the real hero is."

Uncle Butruk could not ignore him now that a throng surrounded them. He accepted the challenge. They then settled on a time and place.

A big traditional key about the size of an adult's hand was a copy of the main hall key. A strong leather rope was attached to the key. A male ornament, it had no practical function other than to use as a weapon.

Uncle Butruk and his brother each took a big key, put the leather ropes underneath their sashes, took off the upper part of their robes, and directly went to the *dobdob's* quarter. The room was dark. Uncle Butruk and his brother faced the darkness and shouted. The

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<sup>21</sup> *Ldob ldob/ Dob dob* = a monk who enjoyed fighting.

*dobdob* and four other four were waiting in ambush and launched a sudden attack. Frantic action tangled the air. Uncle Butruk and his brother desperately slashed the big keys into the dark air and were a bit satisfied when they felt their keys strike. Sparks flashed and they smelled blood.

The frantic struggle continued until they were completely exhausted. Sharp weapons left permanent scars on their faces and heads. Both sides sat around a full bucket of water and refreshed themselves and then continued fighting. Uncle Butruk got the upper hand and intensely continued slashing. The *dobdob* could not withstand this and withdrew. Finally, he was cornered. Uncle Butruk didn't stop hitting. The *dobdob* had no ability to slash back. He touched his sash and then unexpectedly slashed Uncle's arm with a knife. First, Uncle Butruk's key dropped and then simultaneously, Uncle Butruk and the *dobdob* fell to the ground. Everything paused until the atmosphere was disturbed by someone calling Uncle Butruk and the *dobdob's* names. Uncle Butruk's brother carried him out of the room to a doctor. Drops of blood marked their path. Uncle's brother then called some of his relative monks and entered the room where they had fought, but the *dobdob* had been taken away.

Uncle Butruk's arm was not completely cut off, but the vein and bone were terribly injured. Later, the wound became infected and the doctor amputated. The *dobdob* was semiconscious for days. The local authority investigated, but could not judge who was right or wrong. Dondrubling Monastery dismissed all the involved monks.

Uncle Butruk was very depressed because he had lost both his monk identity and right arm - two very significant things in his life. Feeling cynical about his future and believing there was no future for him, he swore that he would avenge his lost arm. Vengeance gave him hope and a goal that were like spiritual medicine that filled his whole being. He sharpened his knife every day and inquired about the *dobdob* who, sensing danger from a desperate man, avoided encountering Uncle Butruk, who continued seeking a chance to take revenge.

News both good and bad news reached Uncle Butruk. The good news was that the *dobdob* had been killed by a boatman on the Yangtze River. His ruthless behavior had provoked the boatman and a

Fighting ensued. The *dobdob* knocked the boatman down and beat him. The boatman then thrust a knife deep in the *dobdob's* belly and tossed him overboard. As a terrible moan wafted through the murmuring river, fresh blood streaked the waters. The poor *dobdob* might have felt thousands of regrets the moment before he died, but it was too late.

Joy and sadness erupted in Uncle Butruk's heart. He was happy about his rival's death but the bad news was that he would now never have the chance to take revenge for his amputated arm. His great ambition to achieve satisfaction by dueling with his rival evaporated. Suddenly he felt lost. A frightening appearance and having the identity of a dismissed monk painfully remained. What was next? What did he want? He didn't know.

### Unexpected Peaceful Liberation

In May 1949, the Guomindang Government was unable to defend northwest China and designated Ma Bufang to be in charge of the military and administration for the Northwest. Ma imposed *baojiazhi*, a grassroots administration system, with ten households as a basic unit. These groups of ten households were then grouped together in still further units of administration. This idea was these groupings would allow the county level to better control people.

This system was commonly practiced in Chinese areas. However, the chiefs in the Nangchen Kingdom ignored this system so it was never successfully implemented locally until, that is, Ma's new appointment. At that time Ma insisted on this system and the Nangchen chiefs eventually agreed. Ma Jun, Ma Bufang's relative and his deputy in Dondrubling, decided to give 1,000 horses to Ma Bufang as the Kingdom's gift to celebrate his promotion to Deputy of Northwest China. He suggested that in doing so, Ma Bufang might not insist on *baojiazhi*.

According to tribe size and household conditions, each chief prepared their contribution. In early August 1949, King Trashī Tsewang Dorje led Drawu Jikme Chief, Buchen Chief, and Lab Chief, and others to Ziling. When they neared Koknor Lake, they heard that

Ma's troop had been defeated in Lanzhou by the communists and that Ma Bufang had fled to Chongqing with his family.

On 25 August 1949, 100,000 PLA troops under the general command of Wang Zhen, marched into west China. Ma's troops were defeated and the Ma Bufang Regime was threatened as the Guomindang Government was on the verge of collapse.

The King and chiefs were in a quandary: What was to be done with the 1,000 horses? They sent Buchen Chief, who was originally from Huangyuan Town, to meet the PLA. Through his connections, Buchen learned that unlike Ma's troops, the PLA were well disciplined and generally not oppressive to local people. The King and chiefs then decided to offer the grant tribute to the PLA. Through the help of the Huangyuan County governor, the King's delegation contacted the provincial administration and traveled to Ziling in a truck sent by the provincial administration while their horses were grazed on the mountains. They stayed in Kunlun Hotel at Dashizi, a crossroad at the center of the city.

On 5 September 1949, the King's entourage participated in the ceremony of the PLA first entering Ziling City. Drawu Jikme Chief made a speech on behalf of the Tibetan people in Qinghai that was recorded on film.

On 16 September, Lieutenant General Liao Hansheng invited the King's entourage to a banquet at military headquarters. King Trashi Tsewang Dorje gave a speech through translation and said, "Our Kingdom is small and remote and has few resources for a large troop. On behalf of my people, we offer the PLA 10,000 horses, 100 furs, ten antlers, ten musk deer glands, and a living lynx."

The lieutenant general highly complemented this patriotic gift, praised the delegation's thought and action with the new government, and accepted the gifts. The lynx was then sent to the Beijing Zoo.

The PLA did not send troops to the Nangchen Kingdom. Instead, Lude (who spoke Tibetan) and his secretary and an assistant were sent with the entourage when they returned to the Kingdom. They reached Dondrubling on October 27. The first thing Lude did was destroy the Tibet Government radio station at a village near the Yangtze River. On 2 November, Lude read a statement of Liberation

sent from the central government at a grand public meeting in Dondrubling.





# **PART TWO**

**1940s-1970s**



# LHAKPA WANGMO

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Lhakpa Wangmo (b. 1946) of Lungda Village experienced the life of a fugitive with her family and Aunt Chimé Wangmo in Drito. She became a commune sheepherder when she was twelve years old. Tsering Sonam, Rinchen, Tsewang Chodron, and Choying Dorje are her cousins. Their fathers are brothers in the Jangtsang Family. She moved to Norbuling Village in 1981.

I was born on a Wednesday in spring in 1946 so I was named Lhakpa Wangmo. Lhakpa means 'Wednesday'. Giving babies the names of weekdays was a common local practice.

Father and one of his brothers came to Lungda Village and married women there. Before Father came to Lungda Village, he secretly hung his protective talisman on a post in his parent's home. This meant that good luck would stay with the family.

Three of Father's brothers became monks in Dondrubling Monastery.

Uncle Butruk had one arm and his face had many deep scars. After Dondrubling Monastery reopened in 1981, he was invited to again be an official monk. He refused because he believed that he had been dismissed. Instead, he continued to live at home and recite scriptures.

Great Uncle, Mother, and I moved to a high valley in summer to herd our livestock. I was an able daughter. At the age of seven, I tended all the family's livestock. Adults never needed to herd with me. After harvest, we returned to the village from the high valley with our livestock.

At this time, the local leader sent his staff to the village to collect taxes, which were paid in barley. The amount of tax depended on the barley yield from the land and the number of people a family had. People who had no land could rent fields from landowners. After autumn, the landowners took half the harvest.

## Father's Caravan Trip

Traditionally, Lhasa, Ziling, and Dartsemdo were key trading sites for Gawa and Nangchen. Routes to and from these locations passed through Gawa. Bandits were a serious problem. Nakchu bandits were on the way to Lhasa, Golok bandits were on the route to Ziling, and Karmdze bandits were on the route to Dartsemdo. To avoid being robbed, businessmen and pilgrims organized caravans and weapons. Generally, a caravan team consisted of more than fifty people.

Father went with a caravan to Ziling. When they arrived, Father's and his friend's boot soles were worn out so they had new leather soles put on. People in Gawa threw away old leather soles but, in Ziling, people soaked them in water, and cut them into strips that could be made into a rope of such value that they traded for two big pieces of bread.

Father went to Ziling twice on business. Each trip to Ziling required four months. Yaks were used for transportation. Father bought tea, dried noodles, crystal sugar, and clothing to sell in Gawa. They made some money and the family's condition improved. Father bought another field, rebuilt our house, and made a lambskin robe trimmed with otter skin for me. Fellow villagers thought that my future was bright.

Dondrubling Monastery gave away barley porridge and noodles that remained when praying and chanting activities were concluded. A village man once hauled buckets of barley porridge and one bucket of noodles on his cow from the monastery to the village. He then called local children to eat. Some adults also joined the meal. We gathered around him with bowls and ate with great joy, though the food was a little sour due to the hot summer weather.

The remaining food was also distributed in my village, but this rarely happened. When a household held a *rindro* ritual, monks were invited to a home for a funeral activity or removing obstacles indicated by sickness or other misfortunes. The host household called children to eat the leftover noodles and rice porridge after the monks left. Unlike food from the monastery, the leftovers were fresh and tasty. The family also gave us a plate full of *torma*. These were

figures made of *tsampa* and butter that were used in rituals. Some were dyed red. These were our favorites and we struggled to get them. The biggest *torma* were always given to Jamyang Zawo, a disabled boy, who had difficulty holding objects, and who drooled when he talked.

He was the youngest of three brothers. One brother was fat and the other was skinny. His father, Trashi, was crippled, the result of polio. He repaired village shoes and clothes for a living. People gave him worn out shoes with a piece of yak skin, and a piece of cloth as materials for the repair. He returned the well-patched shoes with wooden stretchers inside. People paid *tsampa* and meat for his service.

Trashi's family had moved from Zurmang to my village a few years earlier. I heard Trashi had met some difficulties with his chief and had then left with his sons. His wife and a daughter stayed in Zurmang. Whenever men encountered difficulties, such as murders and other conflicts, they left for a new place. Women then joined their men when they were settled. No one blamed women for their men's mistakes.

One day, I returned to my village from summer pasture, I saw Drontso, Trashi's daughter. She was older than me. After her mother died, someone escorted Drontso to her father. I played with Drontso at the village center where old women gathered and made wool yarn. Tufts of wool were scatted here and there, rolling in the breeze. Drontso said, "People in my home collect every piece of wool. Your village has too much wool."

Trashi's Family lived in our village until 1958. Trashi, Jamyang Zawo, and the skinny son did not survive the years of calamity. Drontso lived in Norbuling Village and gave birth to two sons with different fathers. Her fat brother established his own family in Dondrubling.

Unlike Trashi's family, some only stayed one or two years and then left for other places. There was a family from Nancheng or Zurmang. The son grazed the village's sheep, but he was not happy with what he was offered. He said in accented Tibetan, "If livestock owners do lazy things to the herder, the herder does lazy things to the sheep, and finally the sheep do lazy things to the meat."

The Atso Family came to our village. They had many children and a very old grandmother. My cousin and I were curious about the new arrivals and peered at the family from behind stone walls. On a sunny day, they put a sheep skin robe outside the room, and then brought the grandmother, who was naked, on the robe. She was very old and could not walk. Her limbs were locked like wood. They then smeared butter mixed with *tsampa* on her body. Sometime, the grandmother and two small naked children sunbathed on the same sheep skin robe.

A year or two later, the family moved to the upper valley to graze their goats. It was also my family's summer pasture. The grandmother died there and the Atso Family buried her next to their tent. They put up a bamboo stick on the spot and a few mani stones. I was afraid of passing this place, imagining the naked grandmother lying on the sheep skin robe.

### Chinese Come to Our Village

Every evening, people gathered at the village center and chatted. I often followed Great Uncle there and listened: "Red Chinese have already come to some Tibetan areas." "I heard that Red Chinese will force us to send our children to school, and young men will be sent to be soldiers."

Great Uncle stroked my hair and said, "I'm old. Social changes don't matter to me, but I worry about the children. Who knows what will happen in their lives?"

In my imagination, two red men would grab me from Great Uncle's embrace and force me to attend school. Such scenarios were dreadful to most people. People felt panic from the continuing flow of wildly differing information.

Many villagers asked lamas for advise. Some lamas said, "Red Chinese are the strongest power in the world. There is no way to prevail if we struggle against them. We will surely fail. It is better to surrender. Red Chinese are like a rainbow. One day they will disappear."

Other lamas said, "Don't always try to make money. It is not useful. You should spend money for food and clothing. You should enjoy yourselves."

Sanggye Rinpoche often told people, "Don't resist the Chinese, it could cost your life." He invited a Chinese captain to his monastery and told him to take whatever he wanted. This was a clever move. The captain then designated him as a model patriotic lama. Then lama then fled to India when the situation worsened.

I heard that the Norbuling Village prayer wheel cried. Many people heard the prayer wheel screech, and the nearest spring turned bloody. What ill omens! Some people said that the bloody spring was because a Chinese mountain deity and a Tibetan mountain deity were fighting before people began fighting. The Tibetan mountain deity lost, they said, so the Dondrubling's mountain deity was bloodied, which meant that Tibetans would be defeated.

A song against Chinese Communism became popular. Children particularly liked singing it:

Chinese Communists are enemies of Buddhism

Communists are enemies of the world

Chinese Communists have murderous intent behind their smiles

When I heard that the Chinese army had reached Dondrubling, I was eager to see what they looked like. Later, many people said that the Chinese were good – they were not what they had imagined. After the Chinese came, prices were so cheap that even the poorest family could afford rice and wheat flour. The Chinese army bought yak dung from villagers and paid a good price.

The PLA showed a silent monochrome film in Norbuling Village one night. It was the first time people had seen a movie and it created quite a stir.

In the beginning, many Tibetans, both poor and rich, thought the Chinese were not bad. The Chinese gave local leaders positions. Many local leaders didn't change their positions. The Drawu leader, Rinchen Tsering, was the newly administered Gawa County vice-governor. Chinese treated some poor people very warmly. Many got jobs, worked with the PLA, and became PLA members. Whoever



wanted to be a government worker could do so. If a person advocated Chinese Communism and criticized the old regimen, they immediately could have a government job.

A young Norbuling Villager was a monk at Dondrubling Monastery in the morning but, by noon of the same day, he was reportedly seen at the front gate of the army station wearing a guard's uniform. If a man had several months' work experience with the PLA, he could become a 'translator'.

According to local law, if a family had an adult man, then they had to have a gun, otherwise they would pay more taxes, so most Tibetan families had a gun. The Nangchen Kingdom had no standing army. If necessary, men aged eighteen to sixty served as soldiers.

One day, several Chinese soldiers and a translator came to my village, directly entered a neighbor's home, searched, and found two rifles. One was a crude, homemade one. Mother knew her home would be searched next and prayed that all would go peacefully. The soldiers then did come to our home and took Father's gun. The PLA searched for guns in my village and also collected guns from Norbuling Village and Dondrubling Town.

### Village Men Hide in the Mountains

Eventually, an event signaled the worsening situation. In 1958, during a religious festival at Bumda Monastery attended by many, the PLA encircled the monastery and captured as many men as they could, throwing the festival into confusion. Children and women screamed and cried. A few people escaped.

On the same day in Norbuling Village, the PLA ordered all village men to attend a meeting. During the meeting they surrounded and captured them all.

Father and some village men went to Bumda Monastery and didn't return home at the usual time. The village had received news of what had happened from Norbuling Village. Worried about their relatives, no one slept at bedtime. At midnight, the village dogs barked. Some people came to the village. I was full of dread. We slowly recognized their voices as belonging to Father and some other

men. Father said, "We escaped from that monastery. We can no longer stay in the village."

Everyone assembled at the village center and discussed what to do next. Finally, they decided to hide in the mountains until the situation changed. Great Uncle insisted on going with them, though many villagers advised, "You're too old. The Chinese won't capture you. Please stay at home." After a simple meal, the men prepared food, pots, tents, guns, and binoculars. Then they mounted horses and rode behind a nearby mountain.

Locals living there nearly attacked them because they thought they were Chinese. What had happened in other villages, had also happened in their village. Father and the other men hid in the mountains, alternated at sentry duty with binoculars, and boiled tea only at night to avoid being discovered by the Chinese.

The following day, many soldiers came to the village and saw a woman walking on the peak. The soldiers' leader thought it might be a trap and ordered his men to return. After they left, the villagers relaxed because no village women had gone to the peak. They thought it was the local mountain deity protecting the village. The villagers were proud that their mountain deity was protecting them.

I took food to the village men as mother ordered. Father and the others asked me about the village. Before night, I returned to the village. I took food there for two days. Two days later, Father and the other men left that mountain and went to Dondrubling Monastery at night. Great Uncle was so old and weak that villagers took turns carrying him on their backs on the steep mountains. When they reached Dondrubling Monastery, many people had already gathered. The Chinese couldn't easily enter Dondrubling Monastery.

How to free those who had been captured? The crowd was boisterous. Some monks shouted to the monastery storage room keeper to give them the key to the weapon storage room. A monk, who was blind in one eye, was the most active. The storage room keeper put the key on the ground and earnestly said, "If you are a hero, please do whatever you want."

The one-eyed monk said, "The problem is my eye, otherwise I'd be a hero for sure," which made everyone laugh.

There was an attempt that night to free local men who had been taken prisoner. Locals didn't go along the road, but first went to the upper part of Dondrubling Town. The jailed Tibetans had been informed earlier and when they heard holes being dug in the walls of their prison, they started digging from the inside. However, the Chinese discovered this and many more Tibetans were captured and killed.

Some who were not captured returned to the monastery. Others didn't want to stay in the monastery for a long time and took their families to the mountains. Father and other villagers left the monastery and went to Kyanyetang. A family lived there who worked with the Chinese. Father and other villagers attacked them, stole all their livestock, returned to our village, and distributed the booty. Each family got something, even if a family had no men.

### Escape from the Village

The next day, my family and Uncle's family were transporting dry yak dung from a herding site to the village. Father's brothers arrived and scolded, "What stupid work you are doing! Don't you want to live? Everybody in Patang has fled. Some people even fled when they were cooking. Go now!" They then discussed with Father where to take the family so they would be safe. We loaded our valuables on yaks and drove them to the west.

I saw many abandoned yak hair tents along the way. Many people were moving. When we reached a mountain pass, there was something black on the ground. We went closer and saw a corpse in a black robe. The sash was undone and the entire body was swollen. The adults identified him as Dondrubling Monastery Drawu Lama's brother. That was the first time I had ever seen a corpse and I was very uncomfortable.

We camped in Shelchennang Valley that night. Father and other men had sentry duty around the valley. I and Cousin collected yak dung while Mother and other women milked the yaks and boiled tea. I couldn't sleep that night. The image of the corpse was stuck in my mind. I felt terrible.

The next day, we continued on. Father and his brothers scouted ahead. One of my eight uncles had married and moved into Lungda Village. He saw a small, hornless gray yak and said to his son and me, "You two drive that yak with our yaks and then it will be ours. Don't tell anybody."

Cousin and I obeyed.

That evening, other people returned to their tents. Uncle told his son and me, "When adults talk, children should go outside and play."

Cousin refused to leave. His father once again stressed that he should leave.

Cousin said, "Yak, yak, gray, gray."

One monk uncle understood and scolded his brother indignantly, "We don't know what will happen tomorrow. Forget about keeping other people's property!"

The next day, we crossed a river and reached a small lake where we stayed for three days. We had no clear destination. Many had left their homes and haphazardly moved about. The villages were empty all around Norbuling. Nobody stayed in their homes except some who worked for the Chinese. Locals derisively called these people 'Chinese lovers'.

Some old people said hopefully, "After several days the Chinese will return to China and then we can return home. It's just like when the Lhasa Tibet Army came here. We did the same as now. Several days later, they left and we returned home."

My family hoped to quickly return home. It was autumn and the grassland was yellow when I and my family reached Gozhung and Muzhung. Many days slowly passed. That area is a huge plateau located in southwest Dzato County. At that time, it was almost uninhabited. Once they got there, people didn't know where to go next. The entire area was occupied with fugitives. Thousands and thousands of Tibetans from my home area were camped there with their livestock. Many yaks were abandoned. People didn't worry about food.

My family's livestock got sick and some died. To treat the yak disease, they killed a yak and separated the head from the body and

then drove the yaks between the head and the body. They thought this was helpful.

People were nervous when they heard that the PLA would soon attack Gozhung and Muzhung. The Drawu Chief announced that no one could leave. The PLA negotiated with the Drawu Chief and promised not to shoot first. We believed this but, suddenly, the Tibetans were bombarded. The PLA had snuck up in their camouflage uniforms undetected. Everywhere there was shooting as we ran for our lives. Mother grabbed two bags of *tsampa* and another bag of food. Unfortunately, Father got separated from us. Mother, my younger brother, Great Uncle, other relatives from the same village, and I ran in the same direction. A man fell from his horse in front of us and begged, "I am shot. Please save me."

Great Uncle immediately opened his own protective talisman, took out a holy object, and put it into the wounded man's mouth just before he died.

Mother and three other village women searched for their relatives, met some PLA and were captured. Mother and the other women said, "Please let us leave. Our children are waiting for us. Nobody will care for them. If you allow us to leave, we will return with our children."

The PLA agreed, issued them a permit, and told them to show the permit to any other PLA they might meet.

Mother and the other women returned to our camp. There were big tribes who moved all their belongings and hid in rocky mountains. They saw three women coming from the Chinese camps and thought they must have been sent by the Chinese to convince fugitives to surrender. Some people were hiding their valuables on the rocky hills. When they saw Mother and the three other women, they shouted, "Three women are coming from the PLA camp! They must be Chinese spies and Chinese lovers! Capture them!"

Mother and her companions had no hope of surviving. As a woman hurriedly raced by, she said, "Chinese are coming! I left my baby on the ground."

Mother, the others, and I fled.

## Commune Life

The next day, my younger brother, Mother, Great Uncle, two aunts, three other women, a boy, and I continued on. We encountered PLA troops and, once again, we were captured. A Tibetan translator was with these PLA soldiers. This evil man angrily said, "Where is the Drawu Chief, Bokyong Tradé, and the Jangtsang brothers? Tell us."

Mother and other women replied. "We really don't know where they are. We are only women and children. Please let us go." The translator shouted, "All of you stand in a line! You are so stubborn! We will cut off your heads, if you don't change your minds," and then he slowly touched our necks with his sword. Finally, he opened Mother and her companions' bags and took some valuables for himself, including my otter skin robe.

The PLA herded us, along with many other Tibetans, in a northerly direction. Great Uncle was old, exhausted, and ill. There was no medicine. He became sicker and sicker as the days slowly passed and died after we reached Drakar Township, Drito County. Mother and our other relatives buried him in a valley with a Buddha image, which was the most precious object we had.

We camped when we reached Drito County Town. The next day, the PLA separated all the men from their families and sent them to Dondrubling and Ziling 'for study'.

The nomads in Drito didn't flee. Their life didn't change. Mother and many other women went to their nomad tents and begged for food. When they told the nomads what had happened, the nomads were kind and generous, and sympathetically said, "We are sorry for your calamity. Oh! Farmers have such miserable lives," and generously gave sheep, milk, meat, and butter.

Several days later, however, calamity befell the nomads. The PLA collected all the nomads' property and put it in several of the biggest tents. Those tents were soon full of clothes, women's ornaments, and religious objects. The PLA was not interested in collecting Buddhist scriptures. Pages of scattered scriptures fluttered everywhere.

The PLA forced people to herd all their livestock to the same place. Countless yaks and sheep were gathered in a big valley. The

lambs and the cows couldn't easily find their mothers in such a huge herd. The animals mooed and bleated day and night. Two days later, the PLA drove the herd to another place, leaving many dead animals in that valley. The PLA took everything from the nomads, who then had nothing to eat. Some nomads begged food from my camp.

The next day, the PLA separated the nomad men from their families. An officer said they were sending the men to Dondrubling and Ziling for study, but they were actually sent to prison. A little girl tightly embraced her father and wept. She sobbed, "Please don't leave, Father."

Her father said, "I'll return soon," took off his shirt, and said, "Put my shirt on. It's still warm."

The PLA divided the remaining people into several teams. Younger Brother, Mother, and I were put in a small production team located in Dakok Valley near the Drito County center. Other people from the same village were assigned to different teams.

### Attending a Tent School

Each production team had one kitchen. Mother was her team's cook. Chinese selected school-aged children from this team. I was chosen. The Chinese sent us to school, which was a single tent used as a classroom, dormitory, and dining room. Seventeen boys and girls and a teacher were crowded into this tent. The teacher could only teach how to read Tibetan. Beside reading loudly, there was no writing and no explanation. We also had no textbooks, paper, and pencils. Still, I was such a good student that the teacher said, "You should go to medical school. You can be a doctor."

We used sheepskins as mattresses and pieces of felt for quilts. We all slept crowded together. There was almost no space left to put our feet. After we got up, we rolled up the sheepskins and felt rugs together and put them against the sides of the tent to make space for teaching in the center.

The food was not bad. We had yogurt and lamb. Noodles with a lot of cabbage were served for supper. The commune cultivated a small amount of land for vegetables that supplied sufficient cabbage for the tent school.

Daily life at school was the same as that of the commune. We spent most of our time herding, and collecting yak dung, herbs, and caterpillar fungus. We even collected live caterpillars one summer, when the pasture were covered with black worms that had dark hair and red heads. Bird might not have liked such caterpillars since they had long black bristles that protected them from predators. The caterpillar population proliferated in a few days. The pasture seemed dark from a distance. These caterpillars ate grass from top to root and then moved to another blade of grass. Colonies ate the grass completely. It seemed the grassland had been shaved.

The Chinese organized commune members and students to collect caterpillars. We used rhubarb leaves as containers for the collected caterpillars. We did not focus on collecting worms but, instead, killed time by playing and joking. Adults collected caterpillars in their bowls and then dumped them into bags. Everyone kept their own bowls in their own pouch all the time. People never shared their own bowl with others. If you visited a family, they asked you if you had your bowl. If not, they gave you a clean bowl.

After people collected several bags of worms, some men took them away to burn. I did not see the burning caterpillars.

Three months later, I and some other students were dismissed because our backgrounds as rich peasants' children disqualified us from further study. Afterwards, I returned to the production team to herd 1,000 sheep by myself.

Tibetans were classified into different classes: poor peasants, poor and lower middle peasants, rich peasants, and landlords. Rich peasants and landowners were sent to jail. However, the Chinese didn't know much about many people's backgrounds. Those classified as 'ready for study' had to be very careful or they would be sent to jail. We were very afraid of this because most prisoners never returned.

The many lambs that were born at night were rubbed with dry yak dung to remove any moisture and keep them from freezing. Carelessness meant the lambs froze to death and the Chinese then labeled the person on duty as an 'evildoer'. The Chinese said, "Evildoers want to harm Socialism. We must treat evildoers with a firm hand." Many 'evildoers' from my team were sent to jail.



Mother was 'ready for study' and, eventually, the Chinese took away her cook position. I was afraid she would be sent to jail and very carefully herded her thousand sheep, driving the flock into the hills and returning in the evening.

### Chasing Wolves Away

Every morning, many sheep were found dead in the sheepfold, but adults had to deal with the dead sheep, not me.

One day while herding, four wolves attacked my sheep on the upper part of a hill. I worried I would be accused of carelessness and Mother would be sent to jail. I picked up some stones and scrambled up the hill. The wolves noticed me holding stones and shouting as I got closer to them. They then abandoned the nearby sheep, ran down the hill, and attacked the sheep there. I charged at them and eventually drove them away.

Six sheep were killed, including two lambs. I was very worried about how I could explain this and sobbed. I put the dead lambs deep inside a marmot burrow and filled it with dirt and stones. I hid the other four dead sheep under rocks and piled more rocks on top to further conceal them. When I got home with the flock, I secretly told Mother what had happened.

She nervously said, "It's your fault. I'll be sent to jail."

There were thousands of sheep and many sheep died each day, so the Chinese didn't notice that six sheep were missing. Several days later, the cook whispered, "Several sheep are missing. The one that I used to nurse an orphan lamb has disappeared. Don't mention it. It will cause trouble for Sister." She was familiar with these sheep because she had to help orphan sheep nurse every day.

Some days later, several Chinese leaders approached as I was herding sheep. They often suddenly inspected. My flock was on a slope where rocks covered the mountain top. I herded all the sheep in two rock flows while busily leaping in and out of gullies to ensure that I would not fall asleep.

Luckily, I did not sleep that day. Jumping over gullies prevented me from sleeping. Sleep seemed inevitable, like a gray

cloud enveloping my head. My eyelids got so heavy that I could not keep them open.

My mind was totally focused on the sheep. I saw things that were actually only in my dreams. They vanished the moment I awakened. Naps were a great comfort and refreshment but, when a nap became deep sleep and I woke up, I usually found that my flock had disappeared. Sometime, I had to cross two mountains to find my flock.

Spring was a difficult time to herd sheep. Lambs and ewes were separated, otherwise there was no milk when the ewes were milked.

The squad sheepfold was divided in quarters. Each quarter held about 1,000 sheep and had a small room made of yak dung to protect lambs from the cold. Four gates faced the four directions. Each sheepfold opened its gate at a different time so the flocks were separate. There were one or two herders per flock.

One summer, an old woman who had no property and no children was assigned to work with me. The Chinese said she was crazy because she told the truth at commune meetings. When she was asked to criticize the old society, she said, "I was able to survive by begging food from rich people. When I lacked food, I borrowed a yak and begged for food. They gave me food until the yak was fully loaded. I used that until it was finished and then I did it again. Thanks to landlords and rich people."

The leader angrily interrupted: "Nonsense! She's crazy. Don't let her harm the meeting!"

She was never asked to criticize old society again.

There also was a poor old man with messy hair that was never washed. His criticism was ridiculous and hard to believe. This 'advanced element' tearfully complained, "In old society, I was cruelly oppressed and exploited by the landlords. I never had *tsampa* and I never saw butter. When I approached abandoned dead animals for meat, they unleashed their dogs to attack me. I worked for them, but never received payment. I wasn't even equal to a yak or a horse.

Communism and Chairman Mao<sup>22</sup> have saved me from old dark society."

This poor man did not gain respect and promotion. His act only made him pathetic and robbed him of his dignity. His misery was not alleviated in new society. He was incontinent. His pants and robe were often wet, like a baby that doesn't wear a diaper. A strong smell of adult urine followed him wherever he went. The odor was only diluted by the smell of lamb urine that saturated the ground in the sheep folder.

### A Deity Protects the Sheep

We drove the sheep to good pasture on the upper valley slope and searched for dead yaks and sheep to eat. The animal's bodies were well preserved by the dry climate and chilly wind. We selected meat from heads, ribs, and legs and then crushed it to make it chewable. My favorite was fat from eyes.

I worried when fog was setting over the mountain pass, resembling a flock of descending, grazing sheep. It embraced our flock, which we could no longer see. My partner seemed to never worry, unlike me. I worried that Mother would be sent to prison, like my two aunts.

The old woman had her own way to protect the sheep from wolves. She asked me to give her my sling, took it, folded it four times, tied it in special knots, and said, "Asi Chokyong Drolma,<sup>23</sup> please lock the wolf's mouth, fire from the mouth, smoke from the nose." She then blew on the sling, put it on the ground, and said confidently, "Don't touch the sling. Don't worry. The deity protects sheep from wolves." I don't recall any wolf attacks on our sheep after this recitation.

One day during a production team meeting, the leader announced, "A little girl is herding 1,000 sheep. This is remarkable. People should learn from her." He added that some herders were sleeping. The Chinese leader put a badge with a sheep on it on my

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<sup>22</sup> Mao Zedong (1893-1976).

<sup>23</sup> A female deity who protects the Dharma.

robe and gave me a bolt of monk's robe cloth. The leader also sent another girl to help me herd.

After the meeting, the commune leader piled fried bread on a yak-hair cloth. Local herders attacked the pile, crazily putting the bread into their robe pouches. After the crowd had pushed and squeezed, I only got some bits of broken bread. When the cooks and other women asked me what I had brought for them, I gave them the little I had collected

It was local herders' custom to give gifts to their relatives and friends when they visited a household or gathering. Herders said that farmers didn't bring gifts to their friends.

### The Fate of Tsering's Family

Power corrupts, changing relationships between friends and relatives. Lhamo was from our village and married a villager who was Mother's cousin. Sonam was their only son. We and Lhamo lived together to overcome homesickness and challenges after we left home. Sonam was my playmate. Her husband, Tsering, was separated from her and her son for almost a year. Lhamo often prayed to deities for his safety.

Lhamo was promoted to team leader, which meant a lot to her. However, her active sense of responsibility toward the commune eroded her relationship with others. She became a stranger and took commune-related matters too seriously. Her political motivations gained the trust of those above her and she received a rifle as a reward.

When Older Aunt was arrested, Younger Aunt Chimé Wangmo accused Lhamo of being the cause. Aunt Chimé Wangmo believed that Older Aunt once suggested to Lhamo that they escape from the commune to look for Older Aunt's brother and son, and Lhamo's husband, Tsering. Soon afterwards, Older Aunt was arrested. Aunt Chimé Wangmo believed that Lhamo had informed the authorities about this secret conversation.

Tsering had been a fugitive for almost a year and fingers were pointing at him, suggesting he was a counterrevolutionary. He contacted his wife clandestinely one night. Eventually she successfully arranged for him to end his fugitive life and join the

commune. Lhamo's active role as a team leader who had earned revolutionary credibility made it possible for her husband to join the commune without undue suspicion.

Sonam's joyful face told me how happy he was to be with his father again. He told me, "My father surrendered because he missed me."

Aunt and Mother told Tsering that his wife was the sole reason for Older Aunt having gotten into trouble. Tsering was uncomfortable about the deteriorating relationship between his wife and his cousins. Though it bothered him, he could do nothing to improve the situation. I did not know what the actual conversation was between the couple, but he came to Mother and said, "Sister, I can not influence my wife. Tell your sister not to argue with her. She is backed by the Chinese. After we return to our village, we will scold her and make her confess."

Tsering's wife was in a superior administrative position, but her husband soon changed her life and career.

The reason motivating Tsering's surrender was his desire to be reunited with his family, but reality was different that what he had hoped for. His son, wife, and he were in different locations. His son was in school, his wife was at the commune center, and he was in the place where pasture was being converted to farmland. Moreover, he foresaw ending up in a labor camp as his inevitable fate.

The leader of Tsering's work team abused his position. Tsering could not tolerate his baseless accusations and bullying. They quarreled. The team leader accused Tsering of being a dangerous element and labeled him 'ready for study'. Tsering swore to take revenge.

One day, the team leader assigned an extra labor task to Tsering, who angrily refused. They quarreled with nasty words, which only added fuel to the fire. Tsering struck the team leader's head with his spade as the man covered his head with his arms. The spade blade was sharp enough to cut the skin on his arms, staining his shirt with blood.

Tsering immediately regretted what he had done, tore his own shirt into strips, and tried to bandage the wounds. Meanwhile, a cavalry unit came into sight over a nearby hill. The team leader

shouted for help. Soldiers sensed something amiss and thrashed their horses into full gallop. Tsering raced down the slope toward some bushes while the soldiers randomly shot here and there.

Tsering returned to Lhamo under the cover of darkness and told her what had happened. She could only choose the precarious path of an outlawed fugitive and stole a pot, salt, and some food from the public kitchen while Tsering fetched two big horses from a herd of horses.

They dismounted not far from the tent school. Lhamo held the horses while Tsering went to the tent and asked the teacher to let him take his son with him for one night to see his mother, who was acutely ill. The teacher believed him and gave permission. The next day, Lhamo, Sonam, and Tsering were gone. People were shocked how an activist commune member like Lhamo ended up as a fugitive.

Lhamo had a rifle as a reward from the leaders. Tsering also had a rifle that he had hidden in the mountains before his surrender. He retrieved his rifle and looked for familiar fugitives, many of whom had been fugitives for a long while and lived like predators' prey. The PLA, like magic spirits, wore camouflage clothing and were hard to make out on the brown and yellow grassland. Nevertheless, some fugitives successfully eluded them.

Lhamo, her husband, and their son met five men from Norbulung and formed a group. Among them was Trashi Gyamtso, a tall man with a high pointed nose and a beautiful mustache who never wasted a single bullet in hunting and battle. He was Drawu Chief's henchman. Trashi Gyatso said that he had killed fifteen soldiers by himself and also claimed to have killed around seventy soldiers in several battles with other people. He only regretted killing three Tibetans.

One time the Chinese paid him to kill a bandit at Gola Mountain pass. He also killed two Dege men during the Dege and Drawu conflict. He often mentioned the death of these three men while knitting his brows together as he chanted mantras.

One day they encountered around twenty soldiers. The soldiers' camouflage uniforms made it difficult to see them. Both sides fired at each other. Tsering and his group fled and the soldiers did not follow. Tsering and his fugitive group keenly listened for and

looked for any movement around them. At night, they took turns keeping guard.

The fugitives eventually came to an area with no people, no livestock, and no smoke. It was a realm of wildlife. A hazy atmosphere prevailed that somehow was reconciled with their ambiguous destination. They settled in one place until soldiers appeared, and then moved on.

The weather turned colder as winter approached and the soldiers withdrew to their base. The fugitives searched for caves to take shelter. As the weather warmed, the soldiers, like animals that hibernate, reappeared in the mountains and valleys. The fugitives encountered soldiers many times and, when they did, they scattered and then regrouped after the soldiers withdrew.

One time, Tsering and his group were pursued by a unit of soldiers for several days in the Kunlun Mountains. Several other fugitive groups hunted by the same unit joined them. There was then a group of about ninety, including children and women. Eventually, a cavalry unit ambushed them in a valley and indiscriminately fired at them. The group scattered as people desperately ran in random directions. Many fell off their horses, others were injured, and a few were killed. Cavalrymen chased them until their horses were exhausted. Men with guns dismounted and fired back to stop the pursuing soldiers, while women and children continued fleeing to the upper valley.

Tsering called to his wife and son in the dark and found them when they answered. He reported that some of their companions had been killed and captured. The next morning the group, now reduced to eighteen members, fled westward.

They climbed up a slope and rested on the top. The odor of gunpowder permeated the atmosphere. Cartridge cases were scattered around two boulders. Sonam loved such cases and collected them until he was satisfied. He liked to blow them like a whistle for fun. Tsering was concerned that the sound would expose them.

In spring 1963, they reached the southern bank of the Yangtze, where the river slowly flowed through a wide valley. The river had greatly shrunk from its peak expansion in the rainy season. The riverbeds, sand, and stones were exposed on both banks. Strong wind

had formed sand dunes of various shapes. It was here that they unexpectedly encountered about thirty soldiers. It was too late to flee to better hiding and defensive places, such as rocky mountains. Instead, they scurried toward a basin-shaped sand dune for cover, hoping that the soldiers had not seen them. As the soldiers approached, they heard cautious footsteps, crunching sand, and men murmuring, like a flock of loquacious sparrows.

Sonam told me that his heart throbbed and internal organs seethed as everyone beseeched the deities and murmured mantras. The soldiers passed by them, seemingly, not noticing them. Then the soldiers returned over the top of the ridge so that they were in a better position, and fired at the sand dune. Tsering and his group fired back, killing two soldiers, one of whom had a pair of binoculars and was probably an officer.

His death infuriated the other soldiers, who threw several grenades at Tsering's group. One landed near Sonam. It twirled and smoked on the ground. He remembered hearing, "When you are attacked by a grenade, drop to the ground." He didn't run, but instead pushed his forehead to the ground just as the grenade exploded with a deafening roar. Sonam covered his head with his arms and closed his eyes, trying to escape the chaos. No soldiers dared approach them. Trashi Gyamtso, the best shooter, quietly snuck away from the sand dune, leaving a long trace in the sand as the fugitives' bullets were, in time, exhausted. Tsering and his family were desperate, knowing that betraying the commune a second time meant death for Tsering.

A translator shouted in Amdo<sup>24</sup> Tibetan, "Resistance is useless. Please surrender! The People's Liberation Army doesn't harm people. Those of you who want to live, scramble out of the basin."

When the monk from Norbuling Village was injured, his relatives suggested that he surrender. He replied, "I prefer to die rather than surrender to the Red Chinese. Those of you who want to surrender, give me your bullets."

Tsering had neither the energy nor bullets to fight. He said to his son and wife, "I would rather die now than later in public. If you

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<sup>24</sup> Amdo is one of the three traditional Tibetan regions. The other two are Kham and U-Tsang. Each region has its own set of dialects and subdialects.



two want to follow me, sit here. Otherwise, go now and surrender." He was exhausted, like his ammunition.

When Lhamo and Sonam begged him to change his mind, he ruthlessly pushed them away. Lhamo and her son wept, raised their hands into the air, and surrendered with four others.

Tsering ate something from his talisman, removed his robe, climbed over the sand trench, closed his eyes, faced the sky, and chanted *mantras* as a series of bullets struck his chest. He rolled to the bottom of sand dune, exposed under the hot spring sun.

After the fugitives' ammunition was exhausted, the soldiers swept the basin indiscriminately with their machine guns. Ten fugitives were killed, six surrendered, and the others escaped.

On the PLA side, two were killed and a few were injured. The soldiers were deeply grieved that two of their group had died. One young soldier embraced the corpse of the officer and wailed.

Lhamo and Sonam held each other, grieving for Tsering. Although their time as fugitives had ended, a difficult life loomed ahead. Lhamo was sent to a labor camp and her son was sent to an orphanage. A year later, she was released, took her son from the orphanage, and returned to their original village.

Ache from Norbuling was injured and lost consciousness. When he regained consciousness, he saw Tsering's bruised, naked corpse, covered with sand mixed with his own blood. Ache was thirsty and crawled toward the nearby Yangtze River but fainted just before reaching the water. When he regained consciousness, he was surrounded by soldiers who took him to a tent hospital to treat his gunshot wound. He was then sent to jail.

Some years later, Ache was released and returned to Norbuling Village, not expecting that the worst time of his life lay just ahead of him. He was humiliated in public struggle meetings as a number one target and often assigned extra work duties. He admired Tsering's choice to end his suffering.

Trashy Gyamtso escaped that day. A few days later he met a group of soldiers and shot two or three. Meanwhile, one soldier quietly attacked from behind and shot him in the wrist. Trashy Gyamtso looked back and shot at the soldier, who was scrambling to a hiding place.

Trashi Gyamtso was bleeding and was soon unconscious. He awoke in a tent hospital. After he recovered, he was jailed and sentenced to death. Fortunately, a new policy said that no captives were to be executed. He thus became a prisoner for life. He luckily spent the Cultural Revolution in prison otherwise, his fate would have been the same as Ache's.

After he was released in the late 1970s, Trashi Gyamtso returned to Norbuling Village and lived with his daughter and wife. His hearing was poor. Villagers watched him as he crossed the road, since he could not hear vehicles. He was nearly struck by vehicles several times. He died at the age of eighty-three. His wife died a few days later.

### Father's Death

Several people told me about the death of my father, who was the oldest of eight brothers who formed a tight group, which encouraged others to join their group. He and his brothers were the core of this group that eventually had seventy to eighty men.

They came to the north bank of the Salween River to find a crossing. Spring comes to valleys earlier than to higher points on the Plateau. When they arrived, the river was no longer safe to cross. The spring wind brings dust, it settles on the surface, and then the ice melts. They walked along the north bank until they found a bridge. Soldiers had secured the bridge and built a fort to control who could cross. Father's group attempted to cross the bridge and failed. Father and another man then took several grenades and approached the fortress while others fired at the fortress, giving them cover.

Unfortunately, Father and his companions were gunned down before reaching the bridge. The other brothers wailed and risked their lives to drag the two corpses back to their group.

The gunfire alerted a nearby squad. Reinforcements rushed to the bridge. Father's group fired at the reinforcements and fortress as they withdrew. After Uncle Jamyang was shot in the leg, two of his brothers helped him mount his horse. Their group scattered in different directions as the brothers and close relatives stuck together.

Chased by a unit of soldiers, they fled into a dense juniper grove on a slope, seeking shelter. Afraid of ambush, the pursuing soldiers dared not pursue too closely. Uncle's group headed to a cave on the rocky slope, chasing their few yaks and horses down a narrow path into the cave. This big, deep cave oozed water that in winter months became a thick icy wall. Deeper inside the cave, temperature fluctuations had little effect on a tiny spring that seemed never to freeze. Water dripped down from breast-like rocks, producing, over the eons, small craters in the wet floor. Swallows painstakingly constructed mud nests on the high ceiling. This cave was an ideal place to hide in and defend.

The uncles gingerly put their injured brother on the ground as he moaned, pleading for them to be gentle. Panting, gnashing his teeth, closing his eyes, Uncle Jamyang leaned against a bag stuffed with clothes, expecting the worst. Squads of soldiers approached the cave and mumbled about entering. Some soldiers then shot at the cave while another squad attempted to enter, but they were in a bad position. The uncles were above them and could easily pick them off.

After this initial assault failed, they changed tactics and decided to attack from above. When the uncle group heard Chinese whispered again, the uncles panicked and withdrew into the cave, pulling whatever was nearby in front of them as a defense.

They waited until a soldier came down inside using a rope. He was holding a machine gun and began firing as soon as he was inside. This poor man was easily picked off. Tradé shot him. He screamed and dropped his gun, which hung around his neck. He was pulled up, his blood dripping on the floor of the cave.

The Chinese then sent another soldier down, who met the same fate.

After more time passed, the soldiers threw several bundles of shrubs and juniper branches into the entrance. Uncle Trashy Norbu had anticipated this and had earlier taken shrubs and leaves near the entrance further inside the cave. The soldiers then threw white, crystal salts and then tossed in burning juniper leaves. The white materials burst into flames instantly, making sounds like roasting barley. This lasted a short time, but it filled the cave with a strange smell, which worried the fugitives.

The soldiers muttered until the sun set. The wood collected by soldiers provided cooking fuel for the uncle group. They slaughtered a yak, collected water from the spring inside the cave, sat around the fire and had meat, sausage, and tea. Uncle Loyak and Trashy Norbu worried that the soldiers might shell the cave from the other side of the river and wanted to leave but, considering Uncle Jamyang's injured leg, they could not put this into action. Jamyang was conscious of his pain with very breath and each and every moment of his existence during that long and unbearably sleepless night.

When a ray of dawn's yellow sunshine entered the cave entrance, the uncles cooked breakfast tea. Smoke rose into the sky, announcing that the soldiers' siege had failed. The uncles watched the other side of the river with a pair of binoculars and were constantly on the alert for any noise from above. Others of their group cleaned their guns and counted their ammunition, which they obtained in the Jara Area when weapons were parachuted in.

In the late afternoon, a group of soldiers marched along the other side of the river, making everyone uneasy. Uncle Jamyang's leg worsened and he begged them to abandon him in the cave.

Loyak scolded him, telling him not to be stupid. Jamyang did not insist, agreed to leave with them, and then took a holy object from his talisman and swallowed it with water. Jamyang was deep inside the cave while the others sat around the fire and had supper and then chanted evening prayers. As evening prayers were ending, a dreadful explosion came from inside the cave. Thinking soldiers must be shelling them from the other side of the river, they rushed inside and found Jamyang had killed himself with a grenade, making it easy for them to move wherever and whenever they wanted.

They packed and started climbing up the slope under night's cover. Every dozen steps or so, they saw night sentries silhouetted against the star-studded night sky. Tradé, Loyak, and Trashy Norbu quietly approached the first night sentry, who was unaware of their silent steps. Tradé grabbed this poor soldier's mouth from behind while Loyak thrust his sword into his chest. He silently died. They killed three more soldiers before successfully reaching the mountaintop before dawn. Later, as they saw soldiers shelling the

abandoned cave, they thanked the deities for saving them from danger.

Jamyang's death troubled them all. Suicide is a terribly sinful action. The soul of the suicide continues to suffer by repeating the way he killed himself. They vowed to ensure there were no future suicides.

Two days later, they reached Dzagang Monastery where they regrouped with dozens of their men. However, soldiers soon circled the monastery. The uncles and men of their group lured the enemy into an ambush by pretending to surrender and then killing many. They held the monastery for three days before the soldiers called in airstrikes that reduced the monastery to a pile of rubble. Under the cover of dust enveloping the monastery, Tradé, Loyak, and others escaped, but Trashi Norbu and many other men were killed.

Yonton Gyamtso was in his early twenties when he witnessed the final days of Tradé, Loyak, and some of the other men. Tradé and Loyak's group was attacked by a large number of soldiers and were overwhelmed by burst after burst of gunfire. PLA gunners concentrated their focus on machine guns and anyone attempting to use a machine gun to fire back was instantly shot.

A bullet struck Loyak's nephew, who begged his uncle to shoot him. Loyak pointed his warm muzzle at his nephew's chest, hesitated, and then said, "I can't do it." He then asked Tradé, who shot and killed Loyak's nephew.

A couple of other injured men put their gun muzzles to each other's chest and pulled the trigger exactly on three while counting, "One, two, three."

Loyak and Tradé said, "Those who are uninjured should surrender, and tell the Chinese that the masterminds were Loyak and Tradé. Blame us for everything."

While some waved white scarves signaling surrender and walked toward the PLA, Loyak said, "Even though today is my last day, I still want to eat *tsampa* mixed with butter," and put some dry *tsampa* and butter into his mouth.

Loyak, Tradé, and two of Loyak's brothers ate sacred objects from their talisman, pulled off their shirts baring their upper bodies, firmly held their guns, and stood up, indicating their refusal to

surrender. Bullets struck them immediately, thus ending the legendary fighters - the Jangtsang brothers and Tradé.

Yonton Gyamtso escaped into a nearby dense forest where many men hid for months. This was the southern part of Chamdo District. Government soldiers suffered heavy casualties and could not take this forested, rebel stronghold. Finally permission from the central level was given to burn the entire mountain. Soon thereafter, airplanes dropped a flammable material from the bottom of the mountain to top. As the mountain burst into flames, men desperately ran from suffocation and the heat. Those toward the foot of the mountain were able to avoid the fate of being burned alive. Those on the upper slope raced up with the flames and smoke.

Yonton Gyamtso ran desperately to the top where he saw Lukzang, a fat man in his forties, who had led a mutiny in a Yangtze River valley. Lukzang leaned against a tree and died. There were no wounds on his body.

When Yonton Gyamtso reached the mountain top, the government soldiers were waiting to arrest whoever came out of the forest.

### Drolma Saves People

A new translator, Drolma, came to our team. After a couple of days, she realized that the situation was insane and said to the Chinese leader, "The Party and government sent me here to implement a co-operative, not to send people to jail without investigation. If many people are sent to jail, who will engage in production? If things continue like this, I won't complete my mission. I can't work here. I'll leave."

The leaders thought her ideas were reasonable and agreed.

Drolma said to Mother, "If you weren't a landlord or a rich peasant, don't worry. You won't be jailed. If you don't lie to me, I'll help you. Tell me the truth."

Mother then told her how many livestock we had owned and the size of our fields. According to the criteria for classifying landlords and rich peasants, Mother was neither. Drolma then helped Mother and many others cancel their 'ready for study' status. After her

arrival, no one was sent to jail. She was very well liked and appreciated.

Mother and other women from the same village were often homesick. After discussion, they asked the leader to let them return. Drolma and another Tibetan leader honestly said, "It's best if you stay here. Norbuling and other villages are completely changed. Dondrubling natives were sent to other villages and other villagers were sent to Dondrubling. Many villages are empty."

Many were starving to death. Mother and other women from the same village heeded their advice. Although many residents of Upper Yangtze area were starving to death, Drito wasn't as bad off as the farming areas. Every day, many of our team's sheep died so people had mutton every day. Though it wasn't tasty, it satisfied hunger.

Meanwhile, disease killed many. Death was highest among children and old people and was mainly caused by malnutrition. My younger brother died at the age of four, causing Mother much agony. She had experienced so many misfortunes that her spirit almost collapsed. Feeling life was hopeless and tormented by the loss of her son, my brother, Mother walked to the Yangtze to drown herself. Before jumping in, she recited a *mantra* and then an image of me flashed before her eyes. Mother couldn't bear to leave me alone and returned to her work team. At that time, only she knew what she had come very near doing. Other women from the same village often visited Mother and comforted me.

One day, Aunt Chimé Wangmo and a woman from the same village were released from jail. The woman gave me an ivory bracelet and said, "I met your older brother. He returned to Norbuling from the mountains. He gave me this bracelet to give to you. He is still alive."

I and Older Brother had the same father but different mothers. I held the bracelet without moving and wept as I recalled Older Brother and Father.

All the women from the same village again asked the leader to let them return home. The leader advised them to stay in Drito but they didn't listen. Eventually, the team gave each person a yak and a residence certificate legitimizing the transfer. While moving, Mother couldn't walk unaided. Other women tied her to the back of a yak. She

needed help to eat and go to the toilet. Mother was nearly unconscious and murmured constantly. Seven days later, we reached our village. It was late 1962.

### Home Again

Lungda Village was completely changed. No dogs barked. It was utterly deserted and very quiet. We went to Lungpu Village and found three people from my village living there. They were happy to see us. Others came and greeted us. Mother and I temporarily lived in an old nun's home. The villagers said, "You had better butcher the yaks, otherwise the production team will collect them." The next day, several yaks were killed and the meat was distributed among all the villagers.

Meanwhile, Mother was bedridden and becoming steadily worse. Aunt pushed me in front of Mother's bed and said loudly, "This is your daughter."

Mother slowly opened her eyes, looked at me with mingled skepticism and wistfulness, and said, "Who are you?" not recognizing me.

I sobbed and said, "I am your daughter."

The next day, Older Brother came and suggested calling a Tibetan Traditional Medicine doctor from Norbuling. We then walked to Norbuling and asked a doctor to come see Mother. As we were returning, we met some Norbuling Commune leaders who asked, "Where are you going? Who allowed you to leave your team?"

Brother said, "This girl's mother is very sick. I am worried that she won't see her mother before she dies."

The leaders said, "Don't stay a long time. You should return to your team."

After they left, Brother jokingly said, "How I lied! Wonderful!"

When we reached the village, Brother said, "I'll care for you as I care for myself."

When I heard this, I thought Mother had died and loudly wailed.



A villager said, "Why are you crying? Your mother just drank the tea that your aunt offered her this morning."

Still doubting Mother was alive, I entered the door of the room where Mother was and peered through a gap in the curtain. Mother was lying on the bed without moving. The doctor was smoldering juniper leaves around her to exorcise the evil that had made her ill. I was glad she was alive and relaxed.

The next day when I visited Mother, she was back to normal. The doctor gave her some Tibetan medicine and left.

After the yaks were butchered, some leaders came to the village to process the residence certificates legitimizing the transfer and said, "Maybe things were not explained clearly. We won't investigate who are responsible for slaughtering the yaks. All of you should understand that everything is commune property." Then they incorporated my village and Lungpu Village into the same production team.

Norbuling Villagers had no fuel for cooking so they went to Lungda Village to take house and outbuilding rafters to burn for fuel. Not wanting to lose our homes, my villagers met and decided to move back to our own village a week later.

All the villagers' houses were two-storied and made of stone. The second floor had a prayer room, a living room, a kitchen, and a small storeroom. The first story featured a grain storeroom, fuel storeroom, and a room for livestock. A simple single-story room for livestock adjoined the main house.

My home was very rundown with broken windows and grass growing on the roof. A strange squalor gripped the house. Water had dripped on the floor through holes in the roof, mice raced about, cobwebs and spider webs covered the windows, mold flourished in the corners, and the roof of the livestock enclosure was missing. I was repulsed.

Mother, Aunt Chimé Wangmo, and her daughter, and I lived together as a single household. A pot and blanket were all that Mother and I had. Mother was still ill.

At that time, people said, "The worst period of starving has passed. We now have the right to cook in our own homes." Food was still very limited. *Tsampa* was distributed by the production team.

*Droma* 'small wild yams',<sup>25</sup> roots called "pigeon *droma*," and small wild cabbages were collected from fields, near rivers, and on slopes.

While people were starving to death, many swarmed into an area with a limited number of wild plants traditionally identified as edible, but the hunger of so many starving people could not be satisfied. Some dared eat any plant that did not taste awful. As a result, two common plants identified as tasty, were boiled and eaten. People asked, "Why didn't we eat them in old society?"

Local Tibetans usually did not eat vegetables, especially herdsmen. An account emphasizing this went that, when someone offered a herdsman a bowl of cooked vegetables, he said sharply, "Though herdsmen aren't clever, I can distinguish yak food from human food."

Mother and Younger Aunt worked all day with the production team. Cousin and I collected wild plants for additional food. At lunch time, we came home with our harvest. When Mother and Aunt Chimé Wangmo came with the small amount of rationed *tsampa*, Cousin and I were anxious to eat it. Mother knew what we children were thinking and sympathetically put a little *tsampa* in our outstretched hands. Cousin and I competed to see who would be the last to lick the *tsampa* in our hands. Mother put a small amount of remaining *tsampa* in a pot of boiling water with the edible herbs. This stretched the *tsampa* and made the food tastier.

As this mixture boiled, the odor of *tsampa* filled the kitchen, unconsciously rousing my memories of Mother, Great Uncle, and Younger Brother, stirring strong emotions. But when Mother asked, "What's wrong with you?" I always replied, "Nothing." I never mentioned anything that would upset Mother. Any mention of family members might have triggered a relapse.

The production team distributed a few head of livestock to each household some time later. Mother was skillful at tending livestock and we soon had yogurt. The amount was insufficient for all of us so she boiled it with the wild plants. This was tastier than yogurt only.

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<sup>25</sup> *Potentilla anserina* rhizomes.

One year later, Mother and Aunt Chimé Wangmo shared what little property they had and separated into two households. Mother let her sister choose half of the livestock for herself.

Cousin and I herded livestock and collected wild plants together. The subject of our conversation was always food: "What did you have for supper yesterday?" "Did your mother give you milk?"

One day, a father and his daughter were reunited in the village after a long separation. This happened in a family of the parents, a son who was a monk, a daughter, and a son-in-law. They were separated soon after the time of great calamities began. When the daughter came to the village by herself, her father hurried to her and emotionally said, "Are you tired my daughter? Where did you come from? Where have you been?"

The woman sobbed, "After we were captured in Muzhung, we were sent to Nangchen to cultivate land. My husband died. My sister died with hemorrhoids. How is it here?"

The old villager replied in an equally emotional manner, "My dear monk son has gone to Paradise."

I sobbed inwardly while witnessing this exchange.

Finding enough fuel was a problem, especially in Dondrubling Town and Norbuling Village. Although we had little to cook and thus did not cook much, it was very hard to find yak dung. People had escaped with their livestock and now they were returning empty-handed.

Meanwhile, Chinese were cutting the hillside shrubs. Local Tibetans observed this and began cutting wood from the mountains. Before the Chinese came, hills and mountains were regarded as sacred. It was believed that mountain deities dwelt in hills and mountains where there were dense groves that had been protected by many previous generations of local people. After experiencing the time of disaster, people were no longer afraid of ghosts, spirits, and mountain deities. Necessity overcame traditional taboos. Wood quickly replaced yak dung as the major fuel.

As construction was underway for new government buildings, schools, military stations, and associated housing in Dondrubling, state owned brick factories were built. They required much fuel that

brought labor opportunities to production teams who spent the whole year collecting shrubs that were burned to meet the brick kilns' needs.

When I was able, I and other young villagers collected shrubs and carried them in bundles on our backs eight kilometers to market. Each bundle of shrubs weighed about seventy kilograms. It was hard work. After selling the bundles, most people went to a restaurant for a lunch that cost about one third of what the shrub bundle had sold for.

When I sold a bundle of shrubs, I returned home for a simple meal and collected shrubs again the next day. The mothers of my other companions usually collected shrubs and bundled the shrubs for them. I refused to let Mother do this because she was weak and I worried that such hard work would make her ill again.

### Killing a Leopard

One day when I returned home early from Norbuling, the sun was still bright and there were no clouds in the clear sky. I wanted to collect a bundle of shrubs to sell the next day and asked my companions if they wanted to join me. They refused. I then asked Tsenam, a relative, to go with me. He was two years older than me and, on the way, he frightened me with ghost stories and pretended to be shocked by seeing strange things. He pointed here and there and exclaimed, "Look over there! Someone is holding a person's leg." "Look behind you! A headless person is chasing you."

I was alarmed at first, but then I realized he was trying to scare me. I ignored him. We crossed a gorge and scrambled up a dense slope. When we got near a rocky hill, I saw something that looked like a very large cat climbing the hill near a boulder. I exclaimed, "Look! Something is coming behind you."

Tsenam thought I was taking revenge because he had frightened me. He pretended to be terrified by standing absolutely motionless, transfixed, staring behind me, and gesturing that something was about to attack me. I continued to say that there was something behind him and, at last, he stopped joking, fell silent, slowly turned his head and said, "It's something large. Actually, it's a big cat. Wait for me here while I go catch it."

When Tsenam got near the 'cat', he saw it was a creature that, at his approach, began bristling in a fierce aggressive way. Tsenam quickly retreated back to where I was and said, "It is getting bigger. It doesn't look like a cat."

I curiously asked, "What could it be?"

Tsenam said, "I don't know. Maybe my friend, Adro Trawa, knows. I'll go call him. You stay here and watch this creature. Don't let him disappear from your sight!" Then he raced down the slope.

Meanwhile, I walked behind the boulder and peered out. I saw an animal pulling at something on its feet and realized it was caught in a hunter's trap. It was injured. I wondered if it was possible to remove the trap. I wanted it to be free.

Tsenam and Adro Trawa arrived an hour later with two hunting dogs but, when the dogs got near the cat, they were not brave enough to attack. They stopped and barked madly, waiting for their masters. When the boys reached the boulder, Adro Trawa lay down, peered at the animal for a few minutes, and then said, "I know what it is – it's a leopard from behind this mountain. There are many leopards there."

Tsenam excitedly said, "Let's kill it and make some money!"

I didn't want to see anything cruel happen and said, "This animal is injured. Please don't kill it."

Adro Trawa said, "It's a leopard. If we don't kill it, it will kill and eat us. Haven't you heard that the most dangerous animal in the world is an injured leopard?"

Tsenam added, "Yes! He's right. I heard if you kill a wolf, the government will reward you. Wolves and leopards are both beasts that harm people and livestock. If we kill it, maybe we'll get a reward."

I was persuaded and began collecting shrubs. The two boys held stones and scrambled up the boulder. As the dogs barked furiously, the boys pelted the snarling leopard with stones. The enraged leopard lunged toward the mountain edge with enough force to pull out the stake the trap was fastened to. The dogs raced over, crept to the edge of the mountain, and peered down. The leopard had landed on a small overcrop about four meters from where they were standing.

The boys resumed pelting the leopard with rocks. The leopard was quiet for a few moments and then suddenly lunged up at the boys. As its claws grazed Tsenam's chest, Adro Trawa smashed the leopard's head with a big stone, sending it tumbling down the cliff. Tsenam's shirt was shredded and a long, narrow gash ran across his chest. Blood oozed from the wound. The boys shouted, "We killed the leopard! We killed the leopard!" and then said to me, "Keep working. We'll go down and check on the leopard."

I continued collecting shrubs until I heard the dogs barking and the boys shouting, "Don't move, bitch!" I thought the dogs had attacked the boys and raced down the slope. What I saw astonished me – the leopard had its teeth deep in Adro Trawa's wrist. Meanwhile, Tsenam was beating the leopard's belly with a stick, and the dogs were biting the leopard's legs. They struggled in a haze of dust, roars, shouts, and barks in the shrubs. Finally, the leopard was killed.

I went near and asked, "Are you all right?"

The boys answered, "We are OK."

I curiously asked, "Why did you say, 'Don't move bitch?'"

Tsenam said, "Because the leopard would then think that we regarded him as a bitch. This would disappoint him and he would become less brave. If we had not done this, we wouldn't have been able to kill him."

When Adro Trawa tried to carry the dead leopard, his wrist hurt and lacked strength. Tsenam went to the village and brought back a yak to carry the leopard. I bundled up my shrubs and then we returned to the village.

Early the next morning, the two boys called me. They skinned the leopard, cut out its bones, and took the skin and the bones to Dondrubling, where we sold the bones to a Chinese man. The bones weighed fifteen kilograms, which brought 180 *yuan*. They hung the skin on a tree in the town center and small crowd soon gathered. When a man asked, "Who killed the leopard?" Adro Trawa boasted, "I did."

Some women murmured, "Such a thin, little boy said, 'I killed the leopard. How arrogant! Who believes him?'"

At noon, a man paid thirty *yuan* for the skin. The three of us then shared the money equally. I bought a pair of shoes, tea, and salt. I gave the remaining money to Mother.

Tsenam was an orphan and lived with his younger brother. After he got his share of the money, he and his brother ate in a restaurant every day until his money was gone. Some village adults tried to persuade him to be more careful with his money, but he ignored them.

One morning, I saw Tsenam and his younger brother carrying a rafter to Dondrubling, signaling that they had spent all their money. Tsenam usually took rafters from his house to exchange for food from a restaurant. After taking all the rafters from the toilet, the animal shelter, and then the second floor of his house, he and his brother lived on the first floor.

Villagers advised, "You must have a house. If you continue to trade away your rafters, where will you live?"

He replied philosophically, "All is impermanence. Who knows what tomorrow will bring? I would rather be homeless than starve."

Some children were already homeless. At night, they slept in straw on the threshing ground. The commune offered them a very small mount of *tsampa*, which the orphans supplemented with herbs. They also collected and sold shrubs and sometimes stole food from the army station.

Kunga Chopel, one of these orphan children, roused in a semi-conscious state one night and slowly sat up amid the straw. The night was lustrous as dim moonlight shone on the village. Thinking he had died and that his spirit was wandering, he strolled to the very quiet village center. Shadows cast by the walls of the village homes frightened him. He then crept along a path bathed in moonlight near the village. Wanting someone to notice him, he came to the front gate of my house and thought, "If I call her, she'll be frightened and won't come outside. Maybe I should go to Uncle Kunga Zangpo's home. He will surely notice me." Then he went to Uncle's front gate and shouted "Uncle Kunga Zangpo!"

Uncle woke up and yelled back, "What's the matter?!"

Kunga Chophel suddenly became fully conscious and, wondering what he was doing there so late at night, returned to his bed of straw.

### Brother's Death

My cousin, Rinchen, was also an orphan and lived with my older brother in Dondrubling. Older Brother had a wife and a son. Rinchen often stole food from the army station and other units. He was caught several times, but he was too young to be incarcerated. His captors beat him, detained him for some days, and then released him.

He and his companions often secretly entered the arms depot. They thought, as the result of watching revolutionary-themed movies, that PLA soldiers were heroes. They donned PLA uniforms, took a few weapons off the shelves, and pretended to be soldiers. Before they left, they took off the uniforms and returned the weapons to the shelves. Then they stole horse feed - mostly beans - for food.

Rinchen grew more ambitious and thought, "The gate guards are stupid. I can easily get whatever I want." He then stole a machine gun and brought it home, shocking Older Brother who scolded that disaster would follow. Older Brother kept the gun out of perhaps fear mingled bravery and a sense of hope.

Many rumors were circulating. "The United Nations is sending military airplanes to counterattack the Chinese Communists." "The Dalai Lama will soon return." "UN military planes are already in secret places in Tibet."

The day after the gun was stolen, PLA soldiers came to Older Brother's home. His terrified wife stupidly tried to prevent the soldiers from entering the home, screaming, "Flee! The PLA are here!" Like pouring oil on fire, the soldiers rushed through the courtyard gate. Just at this moment, Older Brother came out with the gun. "Boom!" went a soldier's gun and Brother lay dead on the ground. Maybe Brother was about to give the gun to the soldiers. Only Brother really knew. He was only in his thirties.

It was difficult to argue that Brother's death was not an accident. However, another death was quite different. Government agents were obsessed with meetings and urged constant vigilance to



protect Socialism against hostile elements and spies who were constantly plotting to destroy Socialism. One evening during a meeting in Norbuling Village, PLA guards carefully monitored the occasion.

An old village woman went some distance away from the meeting site and squatted to urinate. She was very weak and usually needed help to stand up. After a long while she managed to stand up by herself. Guards were observing from a distance. Detecting a black squirming object, they deduced that it must be a hostile element, and shot the old lady in the head.

Whatever food people collected didn't satisfy their basic needs. In order to get more food, people stole in ways that previously would have been considered immoral. The targets of theft were work units in Norbuling. Adults were not directly involved, but they pulled strings from behind the scenes.

### Stealing Barley

One late autumn day, a village teenager said that there were many bags of barley in the army station near Dondrubling. I and my companions agreed to steal some barley. We had a simple late lunch and started for town, about ten kilometers away. It was still early when we reached the town so we waited for the gathering darkness. We saw many bags of barley in a yard and a guard keeping watch. I and my companions stayed in a ditch and waited.

Light snow began falling. It was gray, quiet, and cold. To pass the time and relieve our boredom, we played games in the ditch while periodically peering at the guard from atop the wall surrounding the yard. One of my companions said, "That guard will soon be replaced. After the new guard sleeps, it will be time to attack."

Soon the guard really was replaced. The new one continued keeping watch. We returned to the ditch and waited for a better opportunity. Cold and hungry, we all hunkered together in the narrow ditch for warmth while we chatted, laughed, and joked, imagining all sorts of food. Food was not only the most attractive topic, but we also made our hunger humorous.

At about eleven o'clock, a boy said, "It's time to move!" We climbed the wall and peered at the guard, who was pacing in the shed under the light. My frightened heart throbbed. Soon the guard lay down on a pile of straw in a corner of the shed. When we thought he was asleep, we quickly moved to the bags of barley. Some of us emptied almost half the barley from a bag that we had planned to carry.

I somehow managed to lift and carry a big bag of barley. Our theft was successful. At midnight, the road was smooth with a layer of snow, reflecting lustrous light. Afraid we would be discovered, we walked quickly through Dondrubling Town without resting. The town was tranquil. When we stopped to rest, my friend said, "Your bag is too heavy. Let's swap bags."

I replied, "No, I can carry this one by myself."

It was daybreak when we reached our village. We went home and divided the barley equally among those of us who had gone on the barley raid.

One companion said, "You are great! You got a full bag of barley. Wonderful." I had carried a bag of barley weighing nearly seventy-seven kilograms more than ten kilometers, and it was all done on an empty stomach. I was also disappointed because I thought that I was entitled to keep the entire bag of barley.

The householder said, "All of you did a great job bringing so much barley. Wonderful! Are you tired my dear children?"

Suddenly, we heard the confused tramping of horse's feet. The householder apprehensively peered through a gap in her curtain and saw three township leaders on horseback approaching the village. Terrified, she turned to us and scolded, "You brought calamity. I don't want your stolen grain. Get away!" She specially pointed out her son. Actually, it was a false alarm, because the leaders rode past the village.

When I returned home, Mother was delighted with the barley and gave some to neighbors whose children hadn't stolen barley. The villagers all praised me and my companions.

Villagers felt thievery was sinful, created bad karma, and would make them poorer. The reason people were poor, they reasoned, was that they had been thieves in past lives. On the other

hand, people thought that stealing from work units or stealing anything that belonged to the State was not a sin. 'China' property was like a boundless ocean. If someone said, "It's thievery, don't steal," other would say, "It's China government property and government property is limitless."

Adults were afraid to steal because they feared they might be captured and sent to jail, but teenagers were at the right age to steal. Adults told children to steal from the government, but not from ordinary people. In many Chinese people's minds, Tibetans were thieves and they wouldn't let Tibetan boys enter government or work unit yards.

I and my friends often went to a work unit yard at night to steal potatoes. Fortunately, I was never discovered. At other times, I and my friends scavenged for potatoes from fields that had already been dug.

Every Sunday, villagers were allowed to visit Dondrubling and individually sell yak dung and milk. Selling yak dung was easy. If I couldn't sell what I had brought before noon, I and my companion went to a work unit yard and peddled the dung door to door. We repeated, "Do you want to buy yak dung? It is very dry." Or, if we were selling milk, we said, "Do you want to buy milk? It's fresh yak milk." Sometimes, we couldn't sell what we had brought and then tried to trade it.

When one of my companions she saw food, she begged, "Uncle Ja 'Chinese', please give me some food." Sometimes, she got the food she requested, but sometimes she received flippant words and a scornful gaze.

I was embarrassed when she was about to beg, elbowed her, and whispered, "Don't do that."

She would reply, "You try to stop me from begging, but you enjoy what I get." Sometimes, when she thought the Chinese wouldn't give her anything, she touched a steamed bread bun with her dirty hands, and then asked for a bread bun. Usually, the Chinese would angrily shout, but then give her the bun she had touched. She always shared what she got with me.

When we were grazing livestock, we gathered and made a rule about how to divide the food. Lutob always broke the rule. When

somebody said, "Please pool your food," everybody took food out of their pockets. When Lutob took out his food, he took a mouthful of it immediately as others shouted, "Stop him!" When we took the food from him, it was already missing a bite-sized piece.

Each person also brought a small bottle of yogurt, which we poured into a pot. When each of us used a stick to eat the yogurt, Lutob used two sticks. When others used two sticks, Lutob was already eating with a finger. When others used a finger, he used two fingers. When others used two fingers, he was using his hand. He always broke the rules. We said, "You always want to win."

One summer, the production team organized all the young villagers and sent them to Rashul Township to dig herbs. Before I left, Mother emptied the *tsampa* box and prepared a small bag of *tsampa* for me. I wanted to leave half the *tsampa* for Mother, but she persistently said, "You'll be away from home. You should have enough."

Youngsters like us had no plan to ensure food lasted a certain amount of time. An old villager worried that we would lack rations and said, "Don't eat too much. Please stop, children," and then we would stop. But whenever he was absent, we stretched hands into our own *tsampa* bags.

Young villagers enjoyed the summer camp. Though some lacked rations before returning home, others shared what they had. When I got home, Mother showed me a full box of *tsampa* and said, "Villagers knew I lacked *tsampa* and gave me this."

Winter is a good time to collect yak dung, which we gathered from upper valleys, then rode the bag down smooth, slippery frozen streams until we got near the village. Sometimes, we slid on the ice using flat stones before collecting dung. We knew if we slid for too long a time, we wouldn't be able to gather a sufficient amount of yak dung. Each time we started to slide down the icy slope we said, "This is the last time." When my bag was not full, I directly went to the corner of the yard and added what I had collected to the pile. When my bag was full, I shouted, "Mother, where shall I unload the bag?"

## The Cultural Revolution

My childhood passed quickly collecting yak dung, wood, and shrubs. When I was eighteen, I became a production team member. I went to work and stopped work according to an alarm bell. Mother and I were both production team members. Rules dictated that a laborer had to work 290 days a year. These were called 'basic days'. If we were absent for a working day, it was deleted from the number of basic days. Per day payment was 0.50 *yuan*. Sometimes we were offered lunch cooked in a huge pot - what we called the 'socialist pot'. All the villagers sat around the huge pot chatting and gossiping at lunch time.

Production team members were classified as poor peasants, poor and lower-middle peasants, rich peasants, and religious people. Some were 'class enemies' and had to continue working during lunch time.

The commune leader blew a whistle calling people to work at eight AM and two-thirty PM. Young people had to work longer than elders because they had to follow the example of Iron Man, Wang Jinxi,<sup>26</sup> a National Model Worker who had met Chairman Mao. When the standard work time was finished, young people and those labeled 'politically suspect' had to continue working. Although I worked extra time, I didn't feel that the work was terrible and boring. We joked, laughed, and sang as we worked. Sometime we divided into two or three teams and competed. We were energetic and enthusiastic. I learned many Chinese songs. Although I did not understand the lyrics, the melodies energized me. We had to learn several songs in case a leader came to the village and gave a song examination. None of us could speak Chinese. To better memorize, we related connected pronunciation of song words to Tibetan meanings, which made the pronounced word sound funny and thus easier to remember.

The song competition was challenging for villagers because we were shy. Any news of a meeting scared us. Mother, who had once had serious psychological problems, was delicate and unable to bear excitement. She was afraid of examinations and pretended to be ill as an excuse for not participating in the song examination.

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<sup>26</sup> 1923-1970.

One day, I and others went to Norbuling Village and found a long line as each person waited their turn to sing. I silently sang some songs in preparation. When my turn was approaching, my heart pounded in fear and shyness. I nearly got confused when I was singing, but managed to finish.

Later, I gradually calmed and noticed humorous things around me. For example, Kunga Chopel would sing before it was his turn but, when his turn came, he forgot the words. Some older women nervously sang in a funny way because of their accents. Those who failed the song exam were labeled 'lacking political consciousness'.

We all held a small red book authored by Chairman Mao<sup>27</sup> and wore a Mao badge on our chest. We supervised each other to ensure everyone brought their little red book. Extremists often stopped others and said, "The highest ... navigation requires a helmsman... revolution needs a helmsman. Where's your handbook?" This book of quotations was seen as the root of life.

Every evening, we congregated in the village center to deal with the same topics - class struggle and a comparison of old and new societies. First, Chairman Mao's teachings were explained, followed by each person commenting on how they thought new society was different from the past. People were illiterate. What the first person said was then repeated by everyone else. When the leader refused to allow people to repeat exactly what someone else had said, some villagers stood nervously and said nothing. The leader emphasized that they should speak and, finally, most said something vague and incoherent.

Meetings were part of daily life. It would have been wonderful if meetings had been scheduled during the daytime but unfortunately, nearly all meetings were held in the evening. We hated attending meetings after a day's work, but there was no escape. Everyone was required to express their thoughts, which was the most challenging aspect. Once someone said something sensible, those who followed said, "I agree with what so-and-so said. My ideas and thoughts are the

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<sup>27</sup> Popular versions of *Quotations from Chairman Mao* were published from 1964 to 1976, had bright red covers, and were printed in sizes small enough so that they could be easily carried.

same as theirs." This worked once or twice. Later, however, the facilitator rejected such statements and told them to explain their own thoughts.

The meetings were quiet. I listened to what others said and concentrated on preparing my own speech. Kunga Chophel, who had once sleep-walked through the village, sat by me. He was very nervous and his breathing became more and more rapid. When his turn came, he stood and said, "In old society, people suffered deprivation and landlords' exploitation. In new society, people enjoy the happiness of Socialism."

Once when it was Kunga Chophel's turn, he stood with his head slightly bowed. The facilitator urged him to say something and waited. Kunga Chophel said nothing. The meeting room was quiet as everyone waited. I could hear my own breathing and feel the biting heat. This sense of tenseness increased the pressure on Kunga Chophel. The veins on his forehead throbbed with blood, becoming ever more visible. Sweat oozed from his pink neck and forehead, forming shiny globules.

He finally said, "The four *news* should be broken and four *olds* should be re-established," shocking everyone because this was the opposite of what was expected. The four *olds* were old thoughts, old customs, old habits, and old traditions that should be broken, destroyed, and replaced by new thoughts, new customs, new habits, and new traditions – the four *news*. Achieving the four *news* was the purpose of the Cultural Revolution.

The Chinese meeting leader pointed at Kunga Chophel and said, "Your thought is incorrect and you should be re-educated," which meant Kunga Chophel was in serious trouble.

Some women begged for mercy. They said that Kunga Chophel was an orphan, an idiot, and did not mean what he said.

The Chinese facilitator said through an interpreter, "You should be careful. This is no joke. There is no next time."

Everybody was relieved.

Another time, Kunga Chophel was forced to express his thoughts during a meeting. He was silent for long time as everyone waited solemnly for him to speak. When the leader again urged him to speak, he finally blurted out, "Look at the production team's old bull.

Since society has changed, he's more useful, and becoming fatter and stronger." He said this unnaturally and with much emotion. People laughed, not because what he said was humorous, but because people were familiar with the old bull.

When I heard my name called, I stood and blurted out my prepared speech in a quivering voice and with a throbbing heart. My speech was acceptable.

In my village, we all gathered at the village center. The targets of criticism stood at the front. My village had a small population and everyone knew each other very well consequently, criticism targets suffered less than in some other areas.

At that time, 'advancer' was a commendatory term that, in the mind of many youths, carried power and status. Becoming an advancer wasn't easy. This designation depended on family background. For example, it was easier for proletarians in old society to become advancers. In old society, advancers had been orphans, vagabonds, hunters, and beggars. Advancers were proud of themselves, believing that "The poorer you are the more honor you have."

Great social change empowered and emboldened uneducated youth to rail against old society and blindly follow the prevailing winds. Advancers were ardent and totally devoid of independent ideas. When authorities organized local people to destroy temples and monasteries, most hesitated. It was the advancers who did such things first as an example to follow.

In Norbuling Village, I saw a wooden image topped by a long conical paper hat inscribed with "Liu Shaoqi<sup>28</sup> Capitalist Class Followers" in Tibetan. The advancers held up Chairman Mao's book of quotations, waved it enthusiastically, and shouted such phrases as "Down with capitalist followers of Liu Shaoqi! Long live Chairman Mao!"

The crowd repeated this unwillingly and inarticulately.

One advancer said in irritation, "We must eradicate these followers of Liu Shaoqi!" Some class enemies were then forced to

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<sup>28</sup> 1898-1969, Chairman of the National People's Congress Standing Committee from 1954 to 1959 and President of the PRC from 1959 to 1968.



wear the same sort of hat as the wooden image and brought to the front of the crowd where they stood, crestfallen and dejected.

The Chinese leader said through a translator, "Class struggle will continue to exist in the primary stage of a socialist society... the Great Leader Chairman Mao leads us in the great proletarian revolution... proletarians now have a chance to take revenge on the exploiting classes..."

These phrases had a profound effect on some advancers. Several advancers immediately emerged from the crowd crying and wailing. Seemingly about to lose consciousness, they spit at, bit, and pulled the hair of the 'class enemies'. Whatever the advancers wanted to do to the 'class enemies' was allowed. One example remains fresh in my memory – an advancer spit on a nun's upper lip. As the spit slowly trickled down to her mouth, the advancer sadistically ordered, "Suck!" The nun sucked and swallowed the spit.

Drongme Rinyak, a forty-year-old 'class enemy' in the 'landlord' class, was paraded to many places and criticized in public. Two extremists would grab his shoulders and shout, "Down with class enemies!" Others would repeat this and try to pull out what little hair he had that had not already been pulled out.

Tsechu Gonpo considered himself a 'pure proletarian' and an exemplary advancer. He did such strange things as make his children wear clothing made from prayer flags imprinted with scriptures. Locals thought he was insane. He always performed emotionally when he attended a criticism meeting. He was deeply affected by his ideas and was once sent to a labor camp.<sup>29</sup>

Advancers and proletarians queued up to punish class enemies. Some sympathetic proletarians, for example, Mani and Palyak, fiercely approached the 'class enemies', seized them from the extremists' hands, and then pretended to slap them.

I was not targeted by the advancers' emotional behavior at criticism meetings, but I was concerned that Mother would be. I repeated the slogans others shouted. I couldn't bear to watch anyone persecuted and maltreated, tried to stay in the center of the crowd, and avoided looking at the class enemies who were deprived of political

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<sup>29</sup> See Dorje Trashi's story.

and human rights, compelled to work extra time in their production teams, and serve the advancers. For instance, two Norbuling Village advancers came to the mountain behind Lungpu Village every Sunday to hunt marmots and antelopes. Both were thought to have been hunters in their past lives. When they reached Lungpu Village, they ordered a nun, whom they called a bad name because of her past association with religion, to come with them and carry their bags. She had to walk all day on the mountains with them and carry their bags to their homes.

### Destroying Religion

One day, my production team was summoned to Dondrubling Monastery, which was dilapidated, dreary, and silent. An advancer said, "The Highest has indicated that religion is an opiate of the people. Down with monsters and demons! Destroy the monastery!"

At first, people felt that they were blaspheming that which was holy. Carefully, prudently, they demolished the building, silently repeating mantras in repentance for what they were doing. Soon, however, they adapted and were less bothered by such actions.

Dondrubling Monastery was divided into several sections. Each production team was assigned to demolish certain designated sections. Religious objects were moved to Dondrubling Town. The production teams were allowed to take all the wooden building materials to their commune to build storage rooms and horse stables. Lungpu and Lungda teams were responsible for demolishing the monastic college. Men dug the earth on the roofs and removed joists and beams, which made the earth on the roof collapse to the next floor while many monks were still seated cross-legged inside the hall.

Rinchen Tsering was one of those monks sitting in the hall. He covered his head with his arms as big chunks of earth fell, creating a thick cloud of dust that made everyone cough. Monks in their own quarters faced the same fate. A few days later, with no place to live, the monks were assigned to the production team, leaving the remains of the monastery deserted.

The monastery property was moved to Dondrubling Town. Treasures were taken to work unit yards. Certain elders knew what

was valuable in a pile of things and clandestinely kept or buried them. The destruction of a centuries-old monastery took only several months while dismantling the *mani* pile in Norbuling Village with its several-million *mani* stones required several years. The *mani* stones were hauled away and used as building materials in town.

Mother kept a three-headed stone deity image in our home. She said, "I took it from Nyezhi's home. Who knows where they are? I heard the Nyezhi family buried their treasure under their house. I hope no one finds and destroys it."

I said, "To keep it is dangerous. Forget it!"

Mother said, "No. Bumda Incarnation Lama would bless me. I miss him so much."

I vaguely remembered this family and Bumda Incarnation Lama. Once I and my cousins played hide-and-seek with him in the Nyezhi home when I was a little child. At that time, this mischievous, playful boy clad in a brown had not yet been chosen as the incarnation of Bumda Lama.

One day monks from Bumda Monastery came to our village and visited the Nyezhi Family. Soon afterwards, the boy was recognized as the Bumda Incarnation Lama and taken to Bumda Monastery. Villagers were proud of him and mentioned him when they talked with others.

Bumda Reincarnation Lama lived in his monastery until one happy day he returned to the village and visited every home, exciting everyone. The village hadn't changed, he hadn't changed, and the villagers hadn't changed. However, locals' attitude toward him had changed. Even his parents and sisters treated him with great respect, but in my mind, he was still a mischievous boy. I never would have imagined that he would have become an incarnation lama. After the time of great calamity, the Nyezhi family members all fled and never returned.

Mother cleaned the stone deity with three heads and put it in the loft, never imagining that this would later cause her to feel enormous guilt. My home was located near a stream. A path ran along the stream to the mountains. Everyone living along the Yangtze River Valley walked along this path.

Mother enjoyed sitting on top of the sheep shed and drinking tea when it was sunny and she had free time. She greeted passersby: "Where are you from? Where are you going? Would you like some tea?"

One particular sunny day as was her usual habit, Mother was drinking tea atop the sheep shed. She noticed several people riding horses, coming up from the lower village. When they got near, Mother asked, "Where are you going?"

They replied, "To your village."

"Would you like some tea?" Mother invited.

"Yes," they said. Mother shielded her hand against the sun and peered at them. She realized that they were several Tibetan advancers and a Chinese man. Her heart pounded in fear and she regretted that she had spoken to them. She was fearful and anxious whenever leaders, translators, and advancers came to the village. Suddenly, the three-headed stone deity image flashed before her eyes. Mother quickly scrambled up the ladder to the loft, took the image, and wanted to hide it somewhere, but she was so terrified that she couldn't concentrate. She murmured, "Where can I hide it?"

Meanwhile, the visitors had already got past the gate. The dog was barking frantically, adding to her fear. She was shaking so badly that she dropped the image. It fell to the ground. Then she raced down the ladder to extend a welcome.

After her guests left, Mother went behind the house and found that the three-headed stone deity image had broken into three parts, leaving her with the broken pieces and a guilty conscious. She had helped demolish the village stupa along with other villagers and had loaded and unloaded Norbuling Village *mani* stones designated to be used as construction material for government buildings, toilets, roads, and even an enormous slaughterhouse in Norbuling Village. None of this caused the guilt that breaking the stone image brought. Her other desecrations were actions that there was no escape from, but the stone image was different. She had, on her own, dropped it – this precious image that had once belonged to Bumda Incarnation Lama. She would never forget what she had done and she would never forgive herself.

Mother's thought and behavior typified many locals at that time who took risks to protect sacred objects from destruction. An

example of this was a Norbuling Village *tangka zhaldrak* 'talking *tangka*'. One of the most important objects in this village's temple, it traced back to Drogon Chopak,<sup>30</sup> an important Yuan Dynasty<sup>31</sup> tutor who presented it to Kalzang Monastery on the south bank of the Yangtze River. Drogon Chopak predicted that a man would come to fetch it in the future. Sure enough, Gyanak Tokdan, the first Gyanak Incarnation Lama, came to Kalzang Monastery centuries later and requested it. The monastery leaders refused. Just as he was leaving the monastery, the monks in attendance were shocked when the *tangka* suddenly said, "Tonden, don't leave me! You are my real master." The monastery then presented it to him and he brought it to Norbuling Village.

When the government ordered people to destroy the temple, Norbuling Villagers were unable to save the talking *tangka*. Soldiers and advancers put many articles in trucks and transported them to Dondrubling to the melody of villagers' impotent wails. But soon, something unexpected took place. One afternoon while constructing a room in the Gawa County Police Bureau yard with *mani* stones, a worker needed something to carry mud that was being used as mortar. She walked to the office and made her request. An old Chinese policeman went to a room and grabbed the first thing his hands touched – the talking *tangka*. When the woman returned with it, everyone's eyes popped. They quickly found something to replace the talking *tangka* and concealed the real one.

### Confessions

Villagers attended meetings almost every evening to confess their errors. Uncle Kunga Zangpo was a common target. Each time, his name was called, he walked through the crowd and stood in front of the chairman's table, facing the crowd. The moderator would say, "Will you confess the mistakes you made in your life?"

Uncle Kunga Zangpo would absentmindedly reply, "Well, I did go to Tongri Mountain and I stayed there for three months. Then I

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<sup>30</sup> 1235-1280.

<sup>31</sup> 1271-1368.

went to Beri Mountain and stayed there for three months. Then I encountered the PLA. I was captured. Then ..."

I don't remember how many times Uncle Kunga Zangpo repeated the same story. I knew his story word for word. I knew it so well that I could even mimic his intonation.

"This is not a confession. Did you have a gun at that time?" he would be asked uncompromisingly.

Uncle Kunga Zangpo would pause for a few moments and then unwillingly say, "Yes, but I had no bullets."

"What did you do with your bullets?"

"I hunted wild animals for food."

"Did you shoot at the PLA? " Then the chairman would pound the table and angrily ask, "Yes or no?"

Uncle Kunga Zangpo would nervously reply, "No, no, yes, yes." Uncle Kunga Zangpo couldn't remember what he had said during the last meeting.

He always tried to conceal the truth, but he couldn't escape from the chairman, who would say, "All right, you did shoot. How many PLA soldiers did you kill?"

Uncle Kunga Zangpo said, "I could never shoot anyone."

"Be frank."

"I am being frank."

"No. You must make a clean breast of your criminal activities. You know that our policy is leniency for those who confess their crimes, while we are very severe with those who refuse to confess."

Uncle Kunga Zangpo said, "Yes, I understand, but I really didn't shoot PLA soldiers." Whenever they reached this point, Uncle Kunga Zangpo's mind was clear. He clearly remembered what he had said in the previous meeting and was steadfast. He wouldn't compromise anymore. He knew his answer to: "How many PLA did you kill?" was key. He knew he was on trial and knew that if he did confess, he would be jailed. He repeated his story at countless confession meetings. Maybe he was right. Maybe he did tell the truth. Who could prove anything?

After Uncle Kunga Zangpo, it was somebody else's turn. Even young girls were required to attend confession meetings in line with Chairman Mao's idea: "There is no perfect person. Everyone, except

for infants, makes mistakes. Criticism of others and self-criticism help in reaching perfection. People remember since the age of five what they have done."

Everyone had an embarrassing time confessing their errors. People mostly confessed their association with religion. For instance, when it was Mother's turn, the meeting chair asked, "What is your error?"

Mother ambivalently said, "I supported religious people, I chanted, I attended religious activity..." which was an acceptable answer during the first few meetings. However, after many repeated the same thing, boredom clouded the meeting. Even very timid people convincingly confessed their errors, but without vitality and energy.

I longed to avoid the meetings. I preferred heavy labor to attending confession meetings. When I faced people, they urged me to confess. But somehow my pure, naïve mind was convinced I had nothing to confess. Others like me faced the crowd and nervously and unnaturally stood silently. "Don't waste time," the meeting head would scold, adding to our nervousness.

Those who were truly clueless made speeches comparable to that of a boy named Trashi Jikme. During one meeting, when called upon, he hesitated and then said, "I don't think Mother was doing some good things. She was murmuring something when she was milking." People were shocked by this allegation.<sup>32</sup>

### Worshiping Mao

The story about Trashi Jikme's betrayal of his mother spread to other villages and he soon had a bad reputation. He was a filial son and did not intend to hurt his mother, but the result was that she did suffer. Many people began to feel that Chairman Mao was so powerful that his mystical presence was all-knowing. This frightened people so much that it made them more loyal to him than to their closest kin.

Years of political indoctrination had taught me the exact definition of 'idol' and 'idolater', something confused me. Chairman Mao images had replaced lamas, Buddhas, and deities. People wore

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<sup>32</sup> See Trashi Jikme's account.

Chairman Mao medals on their chests. Vanguarders visited each home to ensure that each home had at least one Chairman Mao figure. Homes with many Mao images were praised, while those with few were warned.

Though the rationale of a new society was much different than before, there were elements from 'old society'. For instance, Tibetans traditionally wrap an object they deem holy in a silk scarf and put it in a temple as an object of worship. During the time of great calamities, some Tibetans wrapped Mao images in white scarves and displayed them in temples to gain political favor, or maybe it was real worship.

Certain people worshiped Mao in ways to benefit themselves. I heard about an old nun who lived behind a mountain who was a devoted Buddhist. Nothing was more important to her than religion. She was spiritually bereft when the prevailing ideology was not that of her faith. She attended neither work nor meetings. Time passed and she replaced Buddha images with those of Mao and lit lamps in front of them. She wanted to continue her religious activity. When extremists came to her home to remove anything religious, she acted outrageously, yelling popular slogans mingled with phrases from Buddhist mantras. People thought she was mad. When the political climate changed and people could again practice their faith, she became normal.

Some said Chairman Mao was a deity, some said he had supernatural power. A *nyikre* can see supernatural things that others can't. One *nyikre* told me that when a person and a ghost met on a narrow path, the ghost crossed through the person's body unless they were wearing a Mao badge on their chest. The ghost then avoided them. I thought this was farfetched, but I believed that the badges and images might have miraculous power. For example, when I was herding livestock alone on the mountains in the evening, I was afraid of the dark and ghosts. But if I wore a Mao badge on my chest, I felt more confident and protected.

Since childhood, I have believed that lama images and other sacred objects protect me from danger. When I was alone at night, but had something to rely on, I was no longer afraid. It might have been a piece of a lama's clothing, prayer beads, silently murmuring holy words, or wearing a Mao badge.



Herdsmen were especially devoted to Mao. Some herdsmen hung Mao's image in front of their home entrances and said, "It exorcises evil." Certain devotees stood in front of Mao's image and reported what they had done each day and vowed to help others.

Tibetans commonly carve mantras on mountains in white stone. Particularly in summer, mountains and hills turn green, accentuating these gigantic white letters, creating beautiful scenes. Many of these mantra stones were destroyed and, in their place, some herders used white stones to write "Long live Chairman Mao." For them, Mao was an authentic, living deity.

There were two radically different, but concurrent thoughts about Mao. One held that Mao was the reincarnation of Mañjuśrī, the soft-voiced deity of wisdom. In Tibetan minds, Chinese emperors were reincarnations of Mañjuśrī, whose palace was on Wutai Mountain in Shanxi Province. Mao, being the highest leader of China, was thus, logically, also a reincarnation of Mañjuśrī. The second line of thought suggested that Mao was the reincarnation of Langdarma, a Tibetan emperor who was believed to have restricted Buddhism, destroyed monasteries, and forced monks and nuns to resume a secular life.

### Kidnapped by a Ghost

Communism forbade anything related to religion on the grounds that the supernatural and the miraculous did not exist in the material world. Nun Tankho's story demonstrates prevailing circumstance. Talkative and with a shaved head, she lived with her daughter, who was about my age.

One day, all the production team members were working in the fields as usual. She talked nearly the entire day in a high falsetto. She said people's names very gently, particularly the names of children and young people. She customarily added such words before people's names as 'dear', 'hundred years', and so on. Her unique character, particular the tone of her voice, made people aware of her on every occasion.

Tankho was assigned to dig soil out of hole near a field. When it was time to stop work, some villagers went to fetch their livestock,

some went to collect yak dung, and others went directly home. My workmates said that they would go collect yak dung and I went with them. Meanwhile, Mother and some others went home.

I got home before dark and found that Mother had cooked and was waiting to eat with me. After supper, as Mother was taking her urine pot from a courtyard corner, Tankho's daughter called, "Is my mother in your home?"

"No, she didn't come. Maybe she's in your neighbor's home," Mother answered.

"I already asked. Where could she be?" she sobbed.

"Don't worry, she'll return soon. Maybe she went to Lungpu Village," Mother comforted.

Tankho's daughter hopelessly left.

Mother said to me, "Interesting. Tankho doesn't usually go outside at this time. If she did go to Lungpu Village, her daughter would know."

Mother and I then went to bed for the night.

At midnight, there was noise in the village center. Mother peered through the window and saw some villagers gathered, talking animatedly. A woman said, "She and I chatted before we stopped work."

"She seemed quite normal today," another woman said.

Mother thought curiously, "I didn't notice any problem with Tankho today. She was healthy and was not the target of criticism. I wonder what happened to her?" Mother speculated, but couldn't come up with anything. She was unable to sleep because of her concern, but I was exhausted from the day's work and soon slept.

A familiar loud sound woke me from a pleasant dream. It was the call-to-work alarm. It was still dark. I guessed that the alarm was not calling people to work, but was probably about Tankho. Mother and I got up and went to the villager center, where a crowd was arguing about what to do. A young man said, "Maybe a ghost took her somewhere."

His mother immediately said, "Shut up! Don't talk about superstitious things."

Of course, all the villagers knew she said that because she didn't want political problems. Several villagers consoled Tankho's sobbing daughter.

Another villager said, "It's better if we do something rather than talk endlessly. First, we should contact Lungpu Village and find out if Tankho is there."

Everyone agreed and then a villager climbed to a roof top and shouted, "Hey! Lungpu! Hey! Lungpu!" This was the usual way we communicated with Lungpu Village. The only reaction was dog barks. Two men then shouted for some time, but there was no reaction. Though shouting was usually effective, late night was not a good time because Lungpu villagers were surely sleeping. Some young people then went to Lungpu Village to try and locate Tankho. Others returned home to sleep. I went with the young people. When we reached the village, we woke up some families and asked about Tankho.

Lungpu villagers found it hard to believe that Tankho was missing and said things like, "It's impossible for Tankho to disappear without a reason. She's not a young girl, she's a forty-year-old woman." Realizing that something had really happened, I and my companions returned with nothing. I was exhausted and took a long nap.

When the morning work alarm sounded and people had gathered at the village center, the production team leader said, "Tankho vanished yesterday. We will search for her." I felt that his speech was funny, especially the sentence "Tankho vanished." Some young people giggled.

We discussed who had last seen Tankho. Someone said, "Before everyone left, she was in that dirt hole." Villagers went there, but did not see her. We then divided into several groups and went in different directions, shouting her name. We searched the whole day, but didn't find her.

When Mother and I returned home, Mother furtively said, "I think Tankho was taken by a *tsan*."<sup>33</sup> I've heard stories like this before.

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<sup>33</sup> A supernatural creature in the form of a hare-lipped man who rides a red horse.

Tankho's disappearance wouldn't be difficult to deal with, given the proper religious ritual, but such rituals are now forbidden."

The next day, production team leaders reported the case to the local Security Bureau. Later, some policemen came to the village, asked many questions, jotted down the answers, and looked around the fields. They learned nothing new, told the villagers that if they had any new information to please report it, and then they left.

Tankho's daughter sobbed constantly as villagers tried to comfort her.

Feeling that there was no hope of finding Tankho, villagers returned to work in the fields. We talked about Tankho. I and my companions secretly whispered about ghosts, *tsan*, and mountain deities. I enjoyed stories about the supernatural. They were a major form of entertainment for me and my companions. Tankho's disappearance made these stories more interesting and, at this time, many very detailed stories similar to Tankho's case were related.

To many, these stories were genuine because the people and places in the stories were real. While I and my companions were enjoying these stories, a shout came from the dirt hole, "Tankho is here! Tankho is here!" We all stopped what we were doing and swarmed to the hole. Two people carried Tankho out of the hole.

When I heard, "Is she alive?" shouted, my heart throbbed.

"Yes, she is well," someone said.

Tankho's daughter ran sobbing through the crowd, calling "Mother!"

Tankho said, "I'm OK."

She could speak. I found her to be normal, except that her long fast had exhausted her and her face and robe were covered with dirt. People carried her home while village women boiled tea and offered her food, which she wolfed down. Villagers encouraged her to eat slowly, fearing her health would suffer. After she finished eating, villagers asked her what had happened.

Tankho said, "They forced me to make lots of pottery. I was very tired."

"Who forced you?" people asked.

"The ghost," she said.

People were shocked. I was very curious. I liked this sort of story. At any rate, Tankho had been found and news of this spread quickly.

The next day, when we heard some policemen would come to the village, I went with some villagers to Tankho's home to alert her. Tankho was shaking with fear because she had said she had been seized by a ghost. Although she had behaved normally after her discovery, she went into a crazy state when she heard that police were coming. She cried, laughed, and murmured things that nobody understood.

When the policemen reached her home, Tankho's condition worsened and she defecated in her kitchen. When the policemen asked her questions, she didn't concentrate on answering. When asked the same question more than once, she gave different answers. When the police tried to intimidate her, it didn't work. I thought Tankho was pretending to be mad.

She returned to normal after the police left,

This story involves a real person and only locals had an explanation. Such things could only happen in remote villages. The more remote an area, the more vivid such stories were. What local people described was, to them, not fiction. The best demonstration of the proof of these stories were their victims, who were usually controlled by mountain deities. Mountain deities were thought to be of two sorts – those on the side of virtue and those who belonged to evil. The evil ones were greatly feared and locals avoided hunting, sleeping, shouting, and being naked in the mountains. Simultaneously, we pretended to have no allegiance to any deities because the government frightened us more than deities and devils.

### Mother Visits Drolma in Dondrubling Town

The day Mother heard Drolma was in Dondrubling, she said, "Drolma was my benefactor. I'm going to see her tomorrow," and prepared a gift of a big bucket of yogurt and two bottles of milk. Early the next morning, she set off to Dondrubling, which was a very small place at that time so finding someone was easy. Mother soon found Drolma, who was the caretaker of a government guesthouse. Mother was very

excited to meet her and her family. Drolma received Mother with enthusiastic hospitality and asked about Mother's life, and the villagers. Drolma was very happy to talk with Mother.

Drolma said, "Some day, I would like to visit your village," and insisted that Mother stay at her home that night. Mother agreed. The next afternoon when Mother was ready to leave, Drolma gave her dry noodles and rice.

Drolma did visit my home one day. Some village women knew Drolma had come to my home and came to greet her. They also considered Drolma to be their benefactor, recalling how Drolma had helped people in Drito County. Drolma enthusiastically chatted with each person. She was tall, had long hair, and was full of vitality. She enjoyed talking and people liked talking to her. Mother invited her to stay in the village, but she had work in the government guesthouse that night and left.

Mother and I regularly visited Drolma. She felt our home was poorly equipped, and gave us many things that we needed. She was very generous. Villagers admired us. Each time I returned from Dondrubling, villagers asked, "What did she give you?"

Mother and I thought that meeting Drolma was the result of our positive karma. Mother always said to her relatives, "She is my benefactor."

### Dog Massacre

Drolma once gave Mother a lovely, white Tibetan puppy with long hair and a short mouth. When visitors came to my home, she fiercely barked, but everyone still felt she was lovely. She had the habit of standing up, particularly when people were eating. She would stand on her hind legs and swing her head back and forth, seemingly begging for food, amusing the guests.

This dog brought a lot of pleasure to me and Mother, and also trouble during a campaign to exterminate dogs and sparrows.<sup>34</sup> Government propaganda said that dogs and sparrows unnecessarily

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<sup>34</sup> The 'Four Pests' campaign was started by Chairman Mao during the Great Leap forward (1958-1962) to eliminate sparrows, flies, mosquitoes, and rats.

ate food and, when the entire country was considered, this amounted to a huge amount of food. To save food for people, dogs and sparrows were to be exterminated.

Red Guards<sup>35</sup> and soldiers killed all the homeless dogs in the village. The terrible sound of gunshots deeply impacted my villagers. Many women could not bear to see the dogs killed and stayed at home until the dog killers left. The sound of gunshots and the dogs' blood-curdling yelps reminded Mother of her past experiences. Fearing a relapse, she closed herself in our house.

The dog killers next came to individual homes and shot family dogs. When some people tried to stop them, the dog killers explained that this was to help people. Some villagers hid their dogs and others drove their dogs away. Mother loved her dog and didn't want her killed, nor did she want to drive her away. When the dog killers came near our home, she put the dog into a bag and hid it in a dark room. The dog was surely frightened by the gunshots and yelps of dying dogs, but she seemed aware of the danger and kept quiet until Mother took her out of the bag. Later, some Red Guards and soldiers came and asked Mother, "Where is your dog?"

Mother answered, "My dog fled when she heard the gunshots."

Killing sparrows was more challenging than killing dogs. Sparrows are alert and fly away when they are alarmed. Bird killers came to the village at night. They knew that sparrows nested in small holes in walls and under sheep shed roofs. When they found a nest, they jabbed a sharp stick inside, mashing the birds to death.

Sparrows and dogs give a village vitality. The village was deathly quiet after all the killings. Particularly in winter, when the streams were frozen solid, even the sound of running water was absent. Something important was lost, but I didn't know exactly what.

Speakers were set up in each home. The controls were in the production team leader's home and consisted of a phonograph and

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<sup>35</sup> The Red Guards were paramilitary units mobilized by the Chinese Communist Party in 1966. Consisting of university and high school students, they often wore green jackets with red armbands on one sleeve. They aimed to help Chairman Mao combat Party leaders considered insufficiently revolutionary.

microphone. Each day the production leader broadcast propaganda and other programs. We enjoyed this at the beginning, but slowly tired of it. A voice droned on and on about what we had heard hundreds of times before.

The system could also record what people said in their homes and, sometimes, this was broadcast, embarrassing some and amusing others. We were always aware of the speaker in our homes and felt it restricted our freedom to talk. I worried that the speaker would pick up and broadcast our dog's barks, and then someone would come kill our dog. Fortunately, this never happened.

My village was located at the junction of three deep valleys where the pasture was good, so it was also a good place to gather yak dung. During our free time, we collected the dung and then sold it so we could buy daily necessities.

In contrast, Norbuling Village lacked pasture and had a larger population than Lungda. Lack of fuel compelled villagers to come to Lungda. Young men came to my village and spent most of their time playing and gossiping. As the sun set behind the west mountains, they got worried, not wanting to go home empty-handed, and then begged or stole yak dung from villagers.

Mother had accumulated a pile of yak dung in the corner of our courtyard and noticed that the pile was becoming smaller and smaller. I supposed it was being stolen. Yak dung was not difficult to get. It was just like fetching water and we didn't mind much if it was stolen.

Mother sympathized with the young men who stole yak dung and said, "It doesn't matter. It's just yak dung. We can give them some."

The next time two young men came and spent the day on the sunny side of the courtyard wall, Mother approached and said, "Don't waste time. Yak dung won't run into your bags by itself."

When they shyly laughed, Mother said, "Come, I'll give you yak dung."

They followed Mother and I helped them load their bags. They were happy to get the yak dung.

The area around Norbuling was not large and people were acquainted with each other. I knew the two young men. They were



both natives of Norbuling Village. One was married. The other, Sonam Trashi, was unmarried and lived with his mother and stepfather.

Later, whenever I passed by Norbuling Village, I met Sonam Trashi and we enthusiastically greeted each other. When I was carrying a heavy bag to Norbuling, Sonam Trashi purposely asked, "May I help you?"

I always agreed and replied, "Next time I'll give you yak dung."

### Becoming a Mother

I went to Norbuling to enjoy the Losar 'Tibetan New Year' performances in 1972 and met Sonam Trashi, who was with his friends. He was dressed in a PLA hat, a PLA coat, a gray Tibetan robe, and sports shoes – popular dress at that time. I gave him a piece of fried bread. Sonam Trashi put it in his robe pouch. The oily bread stained his robe. I asked, "What will you do today?"

He said, "I'm going to have a photograph taken with my friends. I'll come to your village to ask for yak dung. Is that OK?"

After I assured him that it was OK, he regularly came to my home for yak dung. Mother treated him very warmly and hinted to me that he was nice. I had already kindled a fire with him. Soon, Sonam Trashi's mother knew of our relationship and came to Lungda Village to talk with Mother.

In 1972, I was pregnant, delighting Mother. She went to Sonam Trashi's home to tell his mother the good news. Sonam Trashi's Mother had been sick for a month, was in bed, and pale-faced. When Mother saw Sonam Trashi's Mother, she said, "Your son will become a father."

She smiled hopelessly and said, "That's very good, but who knows how long I can live?"

My cousin, Chokar, came to the village with her husband, a daughter, and two sons. All the villagers enthusiastically greeted them. Mother sobbed, embraced her, and asked how long she would stay.

She replied, "Forever."

Mother said, "Excellent. No matter whether your home is rich or poor, where you were born is the best place." During the calamity when Chokar and her two brothers - one of whom was a monk - reached Gozhung and Muzhung, they were separated by the PLA. She was taken to Drito County where Mother and I had already been taken. Chokar later married Rinnam, a local Tibetan in Drito. When Mother and her other village mates asked the leaders to return to their home, Chokar did not come with them because of her husband.

A decade later, when she returned with her family, she told Mother that it had taken a long time to persuade her husband to move after his parents died. He had finally agreed and had come with her, though his relatives opposed it. She said that many people in Drito County couldn't understand why her husband was willing to go with her to such a distant, strange place just to alleviate her homesickness.<sup>36</sup>

They had to begin a new life - housing, furniture, and so on. They had brought a flock of sheep and some yaks, which were their own property. They had no house so they temporarily lived with Mother and me. Mother's cousin's original house was occupied by Uncle Kunga Zangpo's family, who had moved to Lungpu Village. This house was located next to ours.

In 1973, when my son was born in Lungda Village, Mother sent a boy to inform my husband. When the boy got to my husband's home, he and his stepfather were doing metal work. He immediately dropped his hammer and came with the boy to Lungda Village, where he found me in bed. Mother said, "We must find some holy water to bathe the infant. Please go to her uncle's home and get some."

An infant should be bathed in holy water from a monastery soon after delivery. But at this time, anything related to religion was regarded as superstition and illegal. The only solution was to get holy water from a monk relative. My distant uncle lived in Dondrubling with his nephew. When my husband went to his home and asked for the holy water, Uncle said, "Good. I'll prepare some," pulled the curtains, put clean water in a copper vessel, began quietly chanting, and then filled a bottle with the sacred water.

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<sup>36</sup> See Rinnam's account for more.

When my husband returned with the bottle, Mother prepared some warm water in a basin, put my baby in the basin, poured holy water on him, rubbed the water all over him, and then dried him with a towel. My husband then returned to his home.

I nursed the baby, but he didn't drink much milk. My breasts were often full and ached. Encouraged by their parents, two girls about six years old came to my home and I nursed them. This helped reduce the discomfort in my breasts. When I first nursed them, the girls felt nervous, but they became accustomed to it. They called me 'Aunt'. Later, the two girls would come near my home and shout, "Aunt, do you have free time?" or sang to get my attention. I nursed both girls at the same time.

My husband's mother became increasingly ill. One night, she said she wouldn't live much longer and called all her relatives and neighbors living in Norbuling Village for a final leave-taking.

My husband invited two monks who were from his production team. They wore secular clothing, but they weren't married, expecting that monks would eventually be allowed to return to their monasteries.

My mother-in-law asked the monks, "Should I lie on my right side and face the west?"

The monks said, "Yes, that's right."

My husband, his brother, and their stepfather helped her turn over. Fortunately, the main relatives in attendance were men, so there was no crying, which would only have disturbed her last hours.

The monks said, "Don't be afraid and concentrate on the lama you respect the most. He'll guide you along the correct path."

The monks emphasized, "Don't be afraid," and chanted in a deep voice, which was like a lullaby. Mother-in-law thus entered an eternal sleep when her grandson was one month old. She never saw him.

My husband asked the same monks to supervise the funeral. They chose a sky burial site near Patang, chopped up the corpse, and fed it to vultures. Afterwards, my husband picked up bits of bones and

wrapped them in cloth, hoping to hold a *rupadrub* ritual<sup>37</sup> when it became possible.

My husband's older brother had already married and left the home, leaving only my husband and his stepfather. They had difficulty in cooking, cleaning, and caring for their livestock. As a result, my husband, encouraged by his stepfather, decided to ask someone from my family to come help them.

When my husband came to our home and explained his idea, Mother appreciated his predicament, but insisted that he should move to Lungda Village. It was difficult for him to agree to this. Each tried to persuade the other, but neither would budge.

In my husband's mind, his village was more attractive than my small, remote village. Furthermore, it was the trend to move from small villages to towns or larger villagers, not the reverse. On the other hand, Mother thought Norbuling Village was not at all superior to Lungda and assumed that if she and I moved there, our living standard would decline.

Good pasture and plentiful yak dung were of paramount importance to Mother, who reasoned that if she moved to Norbuling Village, it was subordinating immediate interest to long term interest.

Living conditions in Lungda were far better than in Norbuling. Relatives often came to Lungda and asked for yak dung, milk, yogurt, and cheese. On the contrary, Lungda residents never visited their Norbuling relatives to ask for things. The difference between the two villages was remarkable. Mother's refusal not to move was entirely understandable.

Although neither my husband nor Mother would compromise, they each hoped that, one day, our families would be together. My husband continued his regular visits and, during each visit, we discussed joining the two families, but there was no resolution.

After his mother died, my husband felt his home was empty and without vitality. My husband and stepfather both realized that a home without a man could be a family, but a home without a woman was not a real family. His stepfather eventually brought his sister to their home and she helped them with housework.

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<sup>37</sup> A complex religious activity for a dead person.

My husband's stepfather's sister was in her fifties, a nun, and blind in one eye. He called her *ane*, which means both 'nun' and 'aunt'. Both meanings applied in her case. A few years later, when my husband's stepfather died and the nun left, Mother and I then moved to my husband's home.

# KUNGA ZANGPO

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Kunga Zangpo (1937-2004) of Lungpu Village, participated in Chuzhigangdruk, the resistance group in Gozhung. He was a target of public struggle meetings in his village during the Cultural Revolution. His family moved from Lungpu Village to Norbuling Village in the 1990s. He is Chimé Wangmo's cousin.

## Encounter With a Hare-Lipped Red Man

When I was ten, I herded livestock on the mountain every day. Herding goats is more troublesome than herding sheep, but herding goats ensured I wouldn't sleep because the goats ran everywhere if I didn't carefully watch them. Sheep are obedient and I carelessly rested when I herded them. I tried not to sleep because misfortune follows if you sleep on the mountain. Particularly in spring, when days are long, I would look up at the sun, gaze down at the shadow of the mountains, and eagerly wish time would pass more quickly.

Unable to control myself one day, I fell asleep while on the mountain. Something mysterious happened: A hare-lipped red man riding a red horse approached and offered me a bowl of milk. I didn't want to drink it, but he repeatedly insisted.

Suddenly a crow flew down. One of its wings hit the bowl and the milk poured out.

I heard my sister calling my name as the red man ran away, but to respond was a silent struggle. I could not speak.

Finally, my sisters found me and we went home. My family did religious rituals and I slowly returned to normal. When I recounted my experiences, my family was shocked by the power of Dondrubling Monastery and Paldanzhal.<sup>38</sup> They said that they had

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<sup>38</sup> Paldanshal = a protective deity.

searched for me all afternoon. Fearing I was in danger, they gave some money for *sokha*<sup>39</sup> to Dondrubling Monastery.

### Joining the Resistance

When I became an adult, I frequently encountered misfortunes. Father died on the way back from a business trip to the Drito Area and I brought his body back home.

One day during the lunar fifth month in 1958, some men from Lungpu and all the Lunda Village men attended an annual religious festival at Bumda Monastery, which required a three hour walk to reach. Monks performed the deity dance nearby the bridge over the River, and then offered an empowerment ritual to the crowd. Meanwhile, the PLA encircled the entire monastery and then determined who could and could not leave. In the ensuing chaos, some people managed to escape. We noticed something was happening at this monastery before arriving so we ran to a nearby mountain and hid there until dark.

Zhongan was the oldest man in our village and could not walk on the slope in the dark so he took the road home. He was stopped by some soldiers who shone a torch into his face while murmuring in Chinese. They let him go. Maybe they decided he was a toothless white-haired old man who was not dangerous.

We reached our village at midnight and found that the villagers were well aware of what had happened since three men from Lungpu Village had been arrested in attending a mandatory meeting the same day.

We prepared food and guns and then went to the mountain behind our village for a few days. We met men from Gakla at the mountain pass. They also lived on the mountain for some days. We then went to Dondrubling Monastery at night.

Zhongan wanted to join us. Everyone told him to stay in the village because the Chinese would not be interested in arresting him.

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<sup>39</sup> People donate a small amount of money to a monastery in the hope it will bring luck and help them avoid misfortune. If a person is in a dangerous situation, he can promise to donate two *yuan* as *sokha* and later can give it to a monastery.

Still, he insisted. He wanted to see his monk son in the monastery. We took him with us, but he slowed everyone down. Finally, we carried him in turn and finally reached the monastery.

A few days later, the PLA told people through a loudspeaker to stop resisting. The monks cursed in return. This was followed by shooting and shelling. The monastery's thick earth walls and deities protected the buildings from destruction. Older monks talked about how the Tibet Army had shelled the monastery three decades earlier. One shell had hit the main temple's roof but had not exploded.

In the evening, people abandoned the monastery and went in different directions fearing it was only a matter of time before a large number of PLA reinforcements arrived. We also left our village. On the way back, we saw a household in Kyanyetang that had participated in a socialist cooperative and kept stated-owned livestock. The gate was locked. I jumped over the wall, kicked open a door, and rushed inside a room where I saw someone sleeping in a bed. I slashed the quilt with my sword. It was actually a cloth-pillow-yak tail broom disguised as a sleeping person. The other village men destroyed the gate with rocks and came inside.

Lhapa Wangmo's father scolded me, "How foolish you are! What if someone had shot you?"

Others laughed and gave me the nickname 'Silk Quilt Slayer'.

We took whatever we could find of value and drove around thirty yaks and cows to our village. We equally divided all the loot among the families, including those who had no men.

A few days later, my villagers fled westward and I was separated from my family by a sudden encounter with the PLA in Gozhung. Like others, I went to the northwest, a vast, sparsely populated area, which had become a natural shelter for fugitives. It was also a sort of hell that lacked oxygen, was at high altitude, cold, and endless. I was terrified when we encountered the PLA and suffered constantly from hunger and cold. I often woke up in the grip of a nightmare. Sometimes, to avoid the PLA, I slept during the day and walked at night. I knew that I was old enough to be targeted and imprisoned. Sometimes I found companions, sometimes I was alone.

Though my destination was unclear, I always hoped to meet my family. I kept marching. Gozhung and Muzhung were two



adjacent vast valleys. When I got there, countless fugitives were camped there with livestock, property, tents, and dogs. Other families had nothing. I inquired about my family members, village mates, relatives, and acquaintances.

This vast uninhabited area was a temporary home to the sounds of a huge crowd, a smoky sky, and numerous tents. People spontaneously gathered from different places, creating an enormous camp that had different sections based on where people came from, tribal affiliations, and home communities.

Bandits seemed to be everywhere and in case of bandit attack, people wanted to be with their acquaintances. I found some acquaintances and joined them.

One night, airplanes making loud, reverberating sounds flew over this vast land. Six men parachuted out of the airplanes and immediately kindled a fire on the ground. Subsequently, many modern weapons were dropped, slowly falling to earth by parachutes. I heard a rumor that the six men were from the Chuzhigangdruk and had been clandestinely trained in the USA to be vanguards in a counterattack against the Red Chinese. We heard that United Nations troops would come later.

The next day, men from the planes proclaimed, "Be ready to give your lives to defend Buddhism and Tibetan culture, even if you die. The Chinese Communists are the world's common enemy and are particularly an enemy of Tibet." I joined this resistance group. We were equipped with modern weapons that were more advanced than those of the PLA. Grenades were small as a sparrow and had thirty-two pieces of square metal. The PLA were scared of such grenades. We had no uniforms and no provisions.

In a few days, the Chuzhigangdruk had approximately 4,000 soldiers. Chuzhigangdruk sent the troops in four directions from headquarters. The Gawa and Golok group went north and the Lhowa Lama group<sup>40</sup> went south. Each group had about 1,000 men. The six men who had parachuted out of the planes earlier and some other famous men stayed at the headquarters. The modern weapons and

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<sup>40</sup> Lhowa Lama = abbot of Lungkar Monastery, Dzato County.

news about the UN troops meant the morale of the Chuzhigangdruk troops was high.

Information from our sentries and the fugitives said that a huge number of PLA soldiers were coming to encircle the Gozhung and Muzhung area, which made everyone very nervous. One day, three airplanes flew overhead and bombed the camps. The bombs exploded, filling the air with smoke and dust. I could see nothing. As the sound of shooting and exploding filled my mind, I noticed my companions praying to deities.

While the ground was covered with dust, the PLA ground troops seized this chance to advance. As they encircled us, many assumed a passive attitude as two huge clouds of dust slowly came into view - multitudes of Chinese soldiers. Both sides began shooting. It was hard for us to withstand the PLA's heavy, continuous barrage.

We were terrified and cowered as much as a human can. It was the first time for many of us to experience battle. Bullets plunged into the pile of dirt in front of me. More bullets glanced off nearby rocks. Some of my companions tried to use their weapons, others took cover, and some fled.

Chuzhigangdruk troops lacked discipline. You were free to heroically give your life, sneak away at a critical juncture, or surrender. No one objected. However, the traditional value accorded a hero motivated many of us.

The battle continued for several hours. Feeling I might die at any moment, I seized the chance when many people fled at the same time. It seemed the best time to flee. We rushed back to the Chuzhigangdruk's headquarters. Finding it had been bombed, we fled to the mountains.

The most serious battle had taken place with the Lhowa Lama group to the south. Bombs exploded, making everything murky, and then the PLA had attacked. Gradually, the dust settled and people realized that they were mixed with their rivals, which created more chaos as some fled and others surrendered.

Tibetans near Lhowa Lama were very aggressive, including Lhowa Lama himself. Lhowa Lama's followers believed that, even if they died, Lhowa Lama would save them from Hell. They staged a vigorous offensive and killed many Chinese, but they also lost many

people. I don't know the detailed story of Lhowa Lama, but I know he was a remarkable hero.

I and others fled to the mountains. One afternoon, I saw some PLA soldiers in front of me while I was crossing an icy river. I fearfully lay down on the ice. Fortunately, they didn't discover me. When they passed by, I heard their murmuring and the throbbing of my heart. After I could no longer hear them, I wondered if continuing to suffer from the cold was better, or if I should get up and perhaps lose my life. It was a gamble. I decided to lie on the ice until darkness fell. The ice melted under my body, wetting my robe. I endured extreme cold on that icy river and after the sun set, it got colder. The melted water froze again and I was stuck to the ice. It took some time for me to break free.

I encountered PLA soldiers many times. I avoided conflict but sometimes I had to fight. I had dangerous experiences and witnessed tragedy. Some details have worn away with the passage of decades while others remain indelible.

One day, we encountered PLA soldiers. Both sides fired. Suddenly, there was a loud sound. Two men from Golok had fallen and were shrieking horribly near me. Meanwhile a bleeding horse galloped off but fell after ten steps. I tried to help the Golok man and gave him holy objects from his talisman. He murmured mantras until he stopped breathing. A bullet had accurately passed through the other man's forehead, killing him instantly.

Surprised to see a small hole in the left side of my robe, I slowly put my hand inside my robe and felt my body. Everything was fine. I found the bullet under my armpit. I turned and looked. The PLA were coming and the Tibetans were fleeing. I left the two dead Golok men, disguised by their sheepskin robes, they resembled squatting vultures.

The more dangerous my experiences the more aggressive I became. After being a passive guerrilla for several months, I changed. I hated myself when I was cowering and resolved to do something with my rifle. Whenever I hesitated, I soliloquized inwardly repeating what I had heard others say, "Killing one Chinese soldier is equal to reciting a mantra one million times."

The PLA soldiers were very clever. If they thought it was difficult to attack directly, they would continue shooting or the PLA translator would exclaim, "Please surrender. The PLA will treat you nicely." Meanwhile, they sent soldiers behind us, putting us between their troops.

We hiked and hunted wild animals for food. I didn't have much appetite for meat because we ate it three times a day. I missed butter, *tsampa*, bread, and yogurt. We slept in caves, in tents, and on the open ground. We always carefully looked around in case of sudden attack. I wanted to sleep in a house without worrying about safety. I was really tired of this fugitive life.

Winter was deepening throughout the northern Tibet Plateau. Piercing wind with dust and snow blew across the short alpine grass, chilling us to the bone. However, PLA soldiers steadily decreased in number. The grassland had become quiet, peaceful, and safe, at least for a time.

During this time, we struggled for food, raiding commune storage facilities, reasoning that the property of the people's communes was confiscated from the people. Sometimes, we got *tsampa*, butter, and yaks. At other times, some of our raiding party were captured, injured, and killed. We had a great opportunity to take treasures, but who was interested in such calamitous times? We were only interested in food.

Of course we were regarded as bandits. The authorities announced that the PLA was actively suppressing the bandits. Spring came, the weather became gentle, and 'bandit suppressing soldiers' spread everywhere like ants. We escaped to the remotest areas, but encountered PLA soldiers led there by loyal 'translators'.

One day, the PLA unexpectedly attacked us. Machine guns rang out behind us as we fled. Some of us were killed and some stayed to surrender. Suddenly, something struck my shoulder, pushing me forward one step. Then my buttock was hit. Not fully realizing what had happened, I mounted a horse and fled. When I reached a safe place, I took off my clothes and found two bullets beneath my robe and skin. I wasn't bleeding. "My amulet works. It makes the bullets powerless. The lama and deities are protecting me," I

confidently thought and put the bullets into my talisman. I still have it.

When the government proclaimed a policy of leniency for fugitives, I felt hopeful. I was homesick and desperately hoped that the time of suffering on the mountains would soon end. I considered surrendering hundreds of times, but I was afraid of being a prisoner and then executed. Mostly, I was concerned about my buttock. Though the bullet had not broken the skin, the muscle had been injured and was infected. I had been without treatment for months. No longer able to bear the pain from the infection, I returned to my home village and surrendered.

When I got home, I learned Mother had died. I went to Norbuling Village and visited a Tibetan doctor who operated on my buttock, removed dried pus, and smilingly asked, "Was this caused by a bullet?"

I defensively said, "No, I fell off a horse."

He said, "Trust me, I promise I won't tell anyone. Don't worry."

I told the truth. I soon recovered.

### Suffering from Public Struggle Meetings

I joined the production team and became a member of the cooperative society. Trouble followed. Because I had joined the Chuzhigangdruk, the leaders hurled a counterrevolutionary epithet at me. I became a target of political struggle and was forced to do heavy labor and work extra time. I couldn't rest after lunch nor have Sundays free like everyone else. I was used like a tool or a slave. My commune lent me to different communes to work. Any member of the cooperative who hadn't been negatively labeled was entitled to order me to do anything they wanted. I was forced to attend hundreds of public meetings and forced to confess.

I was suspected of being one of those who had parachuted from airplanes. A key point was that one of these men was a communications specialist. They thought I knew many secrets about the Chuzhigangdruk. However, I knew what I should and should not confess and never compromised. I knew no secrets about the

Chuzhigangdruk. The only secret I had was that I had shot PLA soldiers and that I was with two men as they were dying. I thought, "Somebody has informed. Otherwise, how would they know those two Chuzhigangdruk fighters were with me?"

My longest period of punishment began one morning was when the production team leader called me to confess at a meeting at the Norbuling Village School. A paper dunce hat was put on my head. Unexpectedly, many PLA soldiers were there. I was shocked, scared, and thought, "Is it my last day? I'd rather my life ended quickly." I saw several other familiar targets were also present.

When asked the usual questions, I answered the same way.

The leader furiously shouted, "Overthrow the counterrevolutionaries!"

The crowd repeated this and then the leader, who was Tibetan and more activist than the Chinese, beat me, grabbed my hair, and pulled me to the ground. My hair was very rough and strong. I thought that was why people often touched my hair. They called me 'Yak'. Maybe in their mind I was strong enough to endure punishment.

I was forced to bend over for hours. I really suffered. I felt dizzy and my entire body was in pain. When I couldn't bear it any longer and I moved, I was beaten. Suddenly, Nortse, who was a proletariat, crossed through the crowd and came straight at me. He was clenching his fists, wore an angry face, and scolded me with a torrent of words. When he reached me, he gently pushed me several meters away, which gave me a chance to move my body and relax my stretched muscles. I felt more comfortable after suffering from the waist down for a long time. I silently thanked him.

The meeting ended after lunchtime. I had been bent over for five hours. I returned home and really wanted to rest for several days, but I had to work as usual.

After the Cultural Revolution, my political label was removed and I became the leader of Lungpu Village. My older son and daughter married. I and my wife lived with my daughter. I sent my younger son to Dondrubling Monastery to be a monk. In 1990, I moved from Lungpu Village to Norbuling Village to be able to conveniently circumambulate the *mani* stones.



# PALDAN

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Paldan (b. 1944) of the Gozhung Area witnessed the airstrikes on the Chuzhigangdruk troops and the death of Lhowa Lama, the rebel leader.

## Watching a Battle From a Tent

**T**romtharsumdo is a center of three valleys where many fugitives camped.

"All Tibetan men must join the insurgent group. America dropped weapons," some young men informed our community. Some older men in our community worried, "It could be a Chinese conspiracy. They are good at fooling us."

Many herders from our community returned to our community and said, "Some Tibetans from Gawa and Amdo parachuted from airplanes last night. It's not a Chinese conspiracy."

The planes came at night. Fires made on the ground at several spots signaled where provisions should be dropped. The planes left many parachutes behind, which were visible against the night sky, slowly drifting earthward. Materials were collected throughout the night and the following day. Weapons and food were distributed among the people. The weapons included guns, machine guns, boxes of bullets, grenades, and mortars.<sup>41</sup>

Every ten people shared a machine gun, called *mesin* in Tibetan and *zhongjiqiang* in Chinese. Tents and packaged food were also distributed. The new weapons were so superior to what we already had that the old weapons were destroyed. The provision of weapons and ammunition gave confidence. Some men said, "We can take over the county town with a few mortar shells."

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<sup>41</sup> The narrator used *jog* in Tibetan which, I assume, refers to 'mortar'.



The Chinese had already besieged fugitive camps so not all the weapons could be distributed since. Airplanes came from the east. Some thought they were American airplanes that would drop more food and ammunition. I counted eleven planes flying over the fugitive camps as they began shooting and bombing. Two men dressed in sheepskin robes with bared upper bodies standing near a tent on a hilltop fired at the planes with *mesin*. The plane returned bullet fire and dropped a bomb that hit the tent and killed the two men.

Fighting raged for two days with the rebels scattering into many smaller units. Some broke through the weak frontline and escaped to wild mountains. Many people and animals were killed, their abandoned bodies creating a grand feast for scavengers. All the dead Chinese soldiers were, however, taken away to a cemetery of revolutionary martyrs. Their clothes and bags remained.

Chinese airplanes also dropped millions of pieces of paper. They resembled wind horses, flitting down to the ground where they reminded me of white mushrooms on the grassland. The papers were printed in Tibetan, urged people to surrender, said 110,000 well equipped PLA had been deployed from three routes – Xinjiang, the Tibet Autonomous Region, and Tsongon - and said to resist meant suicide while surrender meant survival.

It was 3,000 to 4,000 men versus an army of 110,000 that was backed up by eleven war planes.

My family did not flee. Unlike the fugitives, we were locals and that place was our home. I watched the battlefield from our tent. Later in the afternoon, a man galloped toward us with two children behind him. When a plane came overhead, he dismounted, put his two children on the ground, shot at the plane, put his two children back on the horse, mounted the horse, and raced away.

Two days later, Chinese took control of the valley. Those who survived during those two days of bombing and shooting formed smaller groups and continued the insurgency. Among them, Lhowa Lama, from Lungkar Monastery in Kyito Township, led a group of several hundred men and fought throughout the autumn and winter. I heard that his group killed a few thousand soldiers.

A day in April saw a major victory for the PLA - they killed Lhowa Lama. His death, however, was not the end of this legendary

leader. His naked corpse was taken from township to township for public struggle. Local revolutionary zealots kicked, stomped, and spat on the corpse.

My community finally decided to flee and moved west with our livestock. One night, a signal flare followed us and we were caught. The men were sent to labor camps and the rest of us suffered from hunger and cold during the winter. A year later, only 300 out of 1,000 of our community had survived.



# GEDAR

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Gedar (b. 1940) of Rashul witnessed the death of his parents and aunt. he participated a raid that killed eleven Chinese, including women and children. He saved a Chinese man who later saved him.

## My Parents and Aunt Die

I was eighteen in 1958 - old enough to be a man. My family followed my community members. We experienced many raids before we reached the north bank of the Salween. Soldiers attacked our group with machine guns and grenades. The sound from far away resembled heated barley when it pops. Many were gunned down. Mother and Aunt were both shot. Some of our men returned fire as the rest of us fled. Three bullets hit Mother, one struck Father, and two hit Aunt. Aunt died that night and Mother died early the next morning. Father could not walk without a stick the first day. He soon had a high fever, hallucinated, moaned for three days, and then died.

The rest of us were unable to cross the Salween because the Chinese had built a fort on the bridge where soldiers was positioned with machine guns. Our attempt to cross the bridge was fatal. Two men who attempted to take over the fort were killed. One of the men was the oldest brother of the Jangtsang nine brothers. His brothers swore to take revenge. His brothers' group included a total of about seventy men. They ambushed and killed many Chinese soldiers. More soldiers poured in to hunt down the brothers' group. Indeed, a few days later, the PLA eliminated this group.

## I Save a Chinese Man and Good Karma Returns to Me

I followed a group led by Gyandram 'Bearded Man'. We crossed from the Tibet Autonomous Region into Tsongon and saw a commune where there were a few Chinese men and their families. They all wore blue suits. They had weapons and shot at us. Our raid was a total victory. We shot eleven people, including women and children. I felt sorry for the women and children. One man escaped during the shooting. I and another man chased and caught him. A very angry man in our group raised his sword and was about to behead the captive. This poor Chinese man was terribly pale and trembling.

I immediately stopped the enraged man, who was furious with me. I also got angry and gripped my sword. We yelled at each other until others stopped us. Our group collected ammunition and food and then left. We let our captive live.

Good intentions and good deeds contribute to good karma. My experience proves that karma is an undeniable fact. A few days later, we were attacked and a grenade exploded, permanently damaging my right knee. I was arrested and taken to the commune site where we were going to be jailed. The blue-suited Chinese man was there. When he saw me, he told the soldiers to release me, took me to a military doctor to bandage my wound, and told me through translation, "Stay with me. I'll get you a gun and a horse. You'll become a government employee."

I thought that if I stayed, the local revolutionary activists would know that I had been involved in the raid. They claimed that they were going to execute us all for killing innocent people. When I said that I was looking for my family and wanted to leave, he gave me a paper written in Chinese that helped when I encountered soldiers on my way back home.

# CHIMÉ WANGMO

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Chimé Wangmo (1925-2003) of Lungda Village was a fugitive with her niece (Lhakpa Wangmo), her daughter, and her sister in the Drito Area. She was sentenced to twenty years of imprisonment in 1960, experienced extreme hunger, and was witness to frequent death during her incarceration. She was released in 1961 and lived with her daughter. She became a nun in 1985 and died at home in 2003.

## A Pregnant Nun

I was born in Lungda Village in 1925. My family consisted of my parents and two older sisters. After Father died of appendicitis when I was a child, our family grew steadily poorer and Mother had a very difficult time caring for us. We had an uncle in the same village who owned a sizeable number of barley fields, had many livestock, and lived in a two-story house. His only son was a monk in Dondrubling Monastery. He took my second older sister to be his adopted daughter.

Later, another family of relatives came to my home from a village thirty kilometers away and adopted me. I stayed there for a few months and then returned home because of homesickness, even though my stepparents repeatedly promised to buy me an otter skin robe and a necklace. Older Sister and I worked for other households in my village for clothing and food.

I became a nun when I was a teenager, however, I neither went to a nunnery nor dressed as nun. I fully participated in farming, herding, spinning wool, and fetching water. Many nuns like me lived with their parents at home and did daily work.

When I was in my twenties, I became pregnant, which was shameful because I was a nun. After my daughter's father gave me

some money to help care for the baby, I separated from my family and lived with my daughter in a small adobe house.

My hair grew long, like that of an ordinary woman. I worked for anyone who would hire me to herd their livestock.

### A Fugitive Life

My daughter and I fled to the mountains with our relatives in 1958 and eventually reached Gozhung and Muzhung where everything was chaotic.

My sisters and I picked up otter skin robes from abandoned property, but Uncle saw this, scolded us, and insisted we put them back. Afterward, we were captured by PLA soldiers. After a Tibetan translator with the PLA threatened to cut off our heads, he confiscated our property for himself.

We were taken to Drito County and assigned to a commune. On the way, Uncle died from exhaustion and old age. My daughter attended a tent school.

The government interrogated everyone in this team to determine our past class status. I was a proletarian and was chosen as the team leader. Oldest Sister was also classified as a proletarian, but she was detained a few days later because Lhamo from my village revealed their secret plan to escape. Second Older Sister was 'ready for study', which meant that she might be sent to jail at anytime and for any reason.

Mother was in another team. After Oldest Sister was captured, her health deteriorated. One day, my niece came and told me, "Aunt, Grandmother wants to see you. She's missing you."

I said, "You go ahead. I'll be there soon."

The Chinese were suspicious about my niece's visit and took me to a room for interrogation. They said, "You have a plan to escape. So does your oldest sister."

I denied this because I had no plan to escape. The Chinese threatened to send me to jail, aimed a muzzle at my niece's chest, and fiercely said, "If you don't tell the truth, she will be shot."

My terrified niece wept and said, "Grandmother wants Aunt to visit her."

Finally, two soldiers bound me tightly and escorted me to Drito County Town where I was interrogated and cruelly tortured. They proclaimed leniency to those who confessed their crimes and severity to those who refused to confess. I finally agreed to say whatever they wanted me to say because of the policy of leniency to those who confessed and also because I hoped to meet Oldest Sister, who I imagined to be in jail. I guessed that Second Older Sister would join us soon.

The Chinese said, "You are a team leader but you deliberately broke the rules. You deserve serious punishment."

I was sentenced to twenty years in Drito County Concentration Camp. It was horrible and incredibly filthy. Disease had spread rapidly and many died.

I looked for Oldest Sister but could not find her. Then I met some people from my home place who gave me the agonizing news that Oldest Sister and Mother had both died.

### Life in Prison

In the fall of 1959, I was sent to a labor camp in Dondrubling. I saw soldiers and Tibetans harvesting the fields, energetically singing Chinese songs. Malnutrition and being in spiritual agony had completely exhausted me. I wasn't interested in the songs nor cared about what would happen to me the next day. I was only concerned about my daughter and food.

Prisoners were divided into various teams. I was sent to a team and lived with thirty people in the same drab, dirty, stinking room. Some people never woke up the next morning.

I met an enthusiastic woman and we chatted about our circumstances and exchanged information about our relatives. She said, "Please visit me tomorrow morning. I've a lot more to tell you."

When I went to her room the next day, her roommate said, "She's gone."

"Where?" I asked in astonishment.

"Paradise. Last night. This was her bed," she said and pointed.

I recognized her belongings. Rather than feel sorry for her, I thought, "Death is better than the condition we are now in."



I was assigned to make adobe bricks and my physical condition steadily deteriorated. I contracted a disease and could no longer work. I imagined the most miserable fate for my daughter without me.

I met an acquaintance from my commune who told me that Mother and my nephew had died and that Second Older Sister could not bear the loss of her four-year-old son. My acquaintance was soon chosen as a team leader inside the jail. One day, she said, "There is work collecting straw. I recommend that you go there with me. We can collect grain." We then collected barley straw for the military horses, while carefully looking for barley grain on the ground.

We only had watery vegetable soup to eat every day and it was far from enough. Prisoners traded their necklaces for food. This golden opportunity to collect precious jewelry only existed if someone was physically able to sacrifice food. One bowl of *tsampa* traded for a *zi* 'agate'. Such trading met the needs of both sides. One accumulated wealth and the other had gained an increased chance of survival.

A woman showed me a big piece of amber and said, "I got this."

"How did you get it?" I asked curiously.

She said, "I exchanged it for a half bowl of *tsampa* from my cellmate. How cheap. I heard my husband and two sons have returned from being fugitives."

Her bed was empty several days later when I went to visit. She had died. That amber might have cost her life. A poor woman like me had no desire for jewelry and never expected prosperity.

There was neither funeral ceremony nor graves for the dead. Emaciated corpses were flung into a big ditch that I often passed by - a realm of hungry ghosts. Some would say that the only thing I had an attachment for in this world was a big bowl of *tsampa*.

The situation outside the prison was not better. Many were starving to death. I heard people ate *tsampa* mixed with ash. At least we had vegetable soup and one hundred grams of *tsampa* per day.

We were generally docile prisoners. Padma Yangkyi, an intransigent woman from Norbuling Village, was an exception. She refused to work and instead, sang religious songs in a melodious

voice. She was handcuffed and put in a single room, which did not alter her behavior.

I once met her in a jail toilet. She was handcuffed and it was inconvenient for her to uncoil her sash. She asked me to untie it because she needed to defecate. After she finished, she didn't ask me to help her tie her sash. Instead, she threw it away. I asked, "Why did you do that?"

"The sash is a troublemaker," she said, adjusted her robe, and left.

We enjoyed her melodious songs, particularly because of our miserable surroundings. She was totally untouched and influenced by the environment, and spoke like a sage. For example, one rainy day, she said, "I washed my hair this morning so it is raining now."

She never recovered and had severe mental problems. She died in the 1990s.

At harvest time, I realized that I had endured an entire year of starvation and suffering. "One year is an alarmingly long time in prison. How can I possibly live in jail for the next nineteen years?" I thought hopelessly. When I was very depressed, I got the good news of the leniency policy. I was released along with many others in the fall of 1961.

I heard my older sister was still alive and that she and other village mates planned to return to my village. I also wanted to return. Some months later, Sister and my niece (Lhakpa Wangmo) returned to our village, but my daughter was still in school. I sent repeated requests that she be sent to me. When I visited the school, the teacher said, "You are a selfish mother. You only care about yourself. Four years later, she will become a government employee. Please don't take your daughter out of school."

I insisted and finally the school agreed.

When I was in jail, I had vowed that I would never again be separated from my daughter if we were ever reunited. We lived with my second older sister and her daughter for a few years.

One day, my daughter and niece went to Norbuling to sell yak dung. My daughter met her former classmates who were, by this time, all government employees. She came back home and angrily scolded, "It's all your fault! You stopped me from becoming a government

employee. They bought my yak dung for a good price. I was terribly shamed."

She was right. It was my fault. I was speechless. Later, my daughter scolded me whenever she was in a bad mood. In 1966, she married a commune leader and gave birth the same year. In 1985, I shaved my head and became a nun again. My family moved to Norbuling Village. My oldest granddaughter became a nun, too.

# SONAM TRASHI

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Sonam Trashi (b. 1947) of Norbuling Village, was a monk novice who travelled to Lhasa by caravan to complete a religious ritual. Upon his return from the Holy Land, he became a fugitive in Gozhung and Muzhung with his family and relatives, including his cousin, Dorje Trashi. He experienced a homeless, street-boy existence, fighting other boys over pig-feed and horsemeat. He hunted marmots and rabbits and was skillful in stealing food from military camps. He married Lhakpa Wangmo and lived in Norbuling Village.

## Carving *Mani* Stones For Grandfather's Death

I was born in Norbuling Village in 1947. My family consisted of my parents, Older Brother, and me. My parents were farmers. We had a small amount of land and a few head of livestock. Father was not native to Norbuling. His parents, two brothers, and a sister had come from Rashul to Norbuling Village after a snowstorm killed all their livestock.

Grandfather died. Giving food to hungry dogs and carving *mani* on boulders were common post-death activities. Being dutiful descendants, Father and his brothers carved innumerable *mani* on cliffs near Lungpu Village. They camped all summer in a deep gorge, rose when the sun did, and worked until the sun set. Their clothes were worn out by scrambling on the cliffs and their hands were toughened from months of carving letters in solid stone.

In time, the memory of Grandfather faded and their lives returned to normal, but the *mani* deep in the stones of the cliffs are everlasting. Although the *mani* eventually was covered by moss, it is always discernible. I can still hear the gorge echoing with the sound

of stones being carved and images of Father and my uncles flash before my eyes.

Mother was from the wealthy Loyul Family.<sup>42</sup> They had so many yaks that, to save time and labor, they often did not tie the yaks at night. Mother had two brothers and a sister. One brother was a monk.

After Mother married Father, she moved to Norbuling Village and gave birth four times. The first two infants died. My brother was four years older than me and was obedient, whereas I was naughty. When guests came to our home, my parents tied me to a wooden pillar in fear I would make trouble.

My family had barely enough food, particularly during spring. Father added to our supply by hunting in the mountains. He usually returned with a big blue sheep, which he put in a small room in our home compound.

I liked touching dead blue sheep. I thought they were like donkeys. Mother did not want Father to hunt. She believed that hunting wildlife resulted in our family condition becoming steadily worse, because hunting results in an accumulation of bad deeds. Father never quarreled with Mother over hunting, but he ignored her complaints.

Blue sheep, deer, leopards, musk deer, and bears were plentiful in the mountains. Father took me with him to the mountains behind my village where I saw hundreds of blue sheep on the cliffs. Father carefully aimed and waited until two blue sheep heads came into sight and then pulled the trigger. With the ensuing "Bang!" the blue sheep herd scattered and two dead blue sheep would fall from the cliff.

### Learning Written Tibetan

I began learning the Tibetan alphabet when I was seven from my aunt's husband, who was a woodblock maker. I had nine classmates, who were all neighbor boys. A room of my house was our classroom.

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<sup>42</sup> See Trashi Jikme's account for more.

There were no desks, blackboards, pencils, or notebooks. The teacher was solemn and harsh. We were very afraid of him.

Our class started just after dawn. We sat on the floor, each holding a page of scripture and reading loudly. Teacher sat on an old carpet in front of us. He was bent over, busily carving wood blocks, but periodically peered over the top of his spectacles to supervise us. If he found a student was absentminded, he stretched out a powerful hand, pulled the child to his lap, pulled up his robe, and thrashed the offender's buttocks with a quirt. The student would squeal a torrent of promises to never again commit an offense.

We had no trousers, so it was easy for him to beat our bare buttocks. When Teacher thrashed me with his quirt, I was exasperated and moaned loudly amid my tears. Teacher mostly punished us with his quirt, but he also thrashed our buttocks with stinging nettles. Fortunately, in winter he couldn't find nettles. The most merciless punishment was for Teacher to hold a student upside down over a pile of smoking straw.

Our subject was Tibetan reading comprehension and calligraphy. We practiced writing Tibetan on boards that had been smeared with butter and then sprinkled with ash. We used sharpened sticks to write. When the board was full of letters, we wiped them away and sprinkled ash over the board again. We also memorized certain common scriptures.

The evaluation of a student largely depended on how beautifully he could write Tibetan letters. Villagers and parents always asked, "Whose letters are the most beautiful?"

We anxiously replied, "I am the best."

To this, people replied, "Oral remarks are no proof. Let's see you write something on the ground."

In truth, another boy and I were the best students. The harder we studied, the more severe our punishment. Teacher explained to my parents, "The more I beat him, the better he does. But, for your older son, if I beat him, he becomes more forgetful, so I don't beat him much."

Although we felt frustrated with this teacher, our parents liked him and said he was the best teacher. There was also another teacher in the lower part of the village who taught another ten students.

Families paid tuition to the teacher. Some of my classmates were from wealthy families.

Teacher took us to circumambulate the *mani* every evening. We then met the other class's students. The two groups of students were attracted to each other and also provoked each other when the two teachers had their backs turned.

Two boys who did not know each other well were always unfriendly to each other. There was no good reason for them to react this way. "Why are you looking at me?" one boy would say.

The other would reply, "Because I want you to be angry."

"If you are a real man, let's fight near the river," the other would return.

Aggressive fought. Other boys, especially in front of a group of boys, would challenge each other, but later not go fight. Adults encouraged children to fight, and parents did not often get involved in children's affairs.

A number of boys in that other class were my opponents. Once, when I went to the lower part of the village, they provoked and humiliated me. I swore revenge. I later fought with some of them and they then avoided passing by my home. I was also afraid to go to the lower part of the village alone.

The concept of hero and coward were clear. We knew that once a boy begged another to stop beating him he would be called 'Fox' or 'Coward'. None of us wanted such a nickname. We wanted to be considered heroes rather than reveal the fear in our hearts. The more frequently you fought, the more ambitious you became. Village boys were always classified as either a hero or a fox. The boys often talked about who was cowardly and who was not.

We swam in the river in our free time, or followed an old Chinese man to learn how to fish and then helped him catch fish. He rewarded us with cigarettes. We enjoyed fishing and got fishing tackle from the old Chinese man. Secretly taking meat from our homes to use for bait, we spent all afternoon fishing, even if the sky turned black and eerie and thick clouds sluggishly moved overhead. We enjoyed the pleasant environment before the storm clouds thickened. In the end, we released the fish that we had caught. I exchanged fish for cigarettes from the old Chinese man. Sometimes, we threw fish

to the other side of the river bank to see if the fish was lucky enough to drop into the river or die on land.

Father soon discovered my clandestine fishing. Although I evaded the question of fishing or lied, Father detected a fishy smell emanating from my hands, scolded me, beat me, and said, "You are a monk novice. You must not fish."

Each time, I promised Father that I would never do it again, but I never kept the promise very long.

When a heavy snow enveloped everything in winter, many large flocks of mountain sparrows came to the threshing yard, pecking here and there, eager for something to eat. Children threw sticks at the flock, killing and injuring many sparrows as the frightened creatures flew off the ground. If any adult saw us they stopped us and informed our parents.

Festivals included Losar, the *mani* festival, monastery festivals, and my village's summer gathering. Losar and the village gathering were my favorites. The village gathering was held on a big meadow near the river in July. Each of the village's thirty families pitched tents in a meadow. This gathering lasted about ten days. Villagers ate rice, dried noodles, and sweet food during this time. These were considered very good foods.

Rosy summer sunbeams flashed across a bright blue patch of sky. Ubiquitous green meadows attracted villagers. All the summer villagers seemed to be on holiday. There was nowhere to go to work. No one was building and working for payment. There was no difference between the days of the week. Spending time in beautiful places near river during nice days was great entertainment. People lazily chatted, splashed water on each other, and chased each other. Young men carried young women to the river and dropped them in the water. Finally, no one was dry. Everyone was soaked.

Sometimes, water games were held in the village. People brought water with pots and dippers and splashed each other. People also splashed passersby. The Drawu Chief was like everyone else during these games. He was chased around the village and, when he hid in his home, people followed him into every room except for the prayer room.



## Herders' Visits

Festival times were the only time children could enjoy good food. Even rich villagers, such as the Drawu Chief's family members, carefully regulated their consumption of rice, candy, and dried noodles. Meat, butter, and dried meat were common food and children had little interest in them.

The Drawu Chief's family's tent was the biggest and grandest and was pitched in the middle of the other tents. There was also a large open area for horse racing. My family tent was near the horse racing spot so I could easily enjoy the performances that included singing, dancing, and horse racing, all performed by the villagers. We all knew who sang well and who was skilled at certain activities. If you were good at something, others encouraged you to perform. The same singers sang the usual songs. *Norbuling chodro* dances performed by village men and had a history of many generations.

I liked the horse races best. When a dozen or so riders galloped toward the finish line, the crowd shouted, encouraging the riders. Displays of horsemanship stimulated the audience's spirits. The riders hooked their pointed boots in the stirrups, and let their bodies be dragged across the smooth meadow. As a rider was pulled along by a galloping horse, his long sleeves fluttered with the horse's tail.

All the riders wanted to be best, but some were timid and allowed themselves to be dragged only a short distance. The audience did not appreciate them. Some riders, once they were in a horizontal position, regained their saddle or fell off away from the horse.

Those from Dondrubling and neighbor villages ate meals with their relatives and friends who had pitched tents. Those without local friends or relatives had a simple lunch near the river and the village committee offered tea.

The *mani* festival was held on the fourteenth and fifteenth days of the first and twelfth Tibetan lunar months. Several thousand Tibetans from Gawa, Sershul, Mato, and Chamdo arrived in Norbuling Village to circumambulate the *mani* and purchase *mani* stones that they then put on the ever-growing *mani* pile. On the fifteenth day, Dondrubling Monastery monks conducted an empowerment ritual of empowerment.

Villagers offered accommodations for visitors from far away. Every village family had several small guest rooms. Each room had a window and a door. The host family charged no money for accommodation. Families hoped that guests would purchase *mani* stones and introduce more customers to them.

Because the village's ability to accommodate guests was limited, many people camped in nearby fields and by the river that ran by the village. Yaks and horses brought by the visitors surrounded what had temporarily become a large camp. The yaks were used to transport, for example, purchased *mani* stones. Many nomads had no money and exchanged animals or animal products for *mani* stones.

Along the circumambulation route, devotees chanted tunefully. Nearby, along the road that runs by the village, a bustling market emanated a merry clamor of endless bargaining.

People seized this public occasion to exhibit splendid attire. For this vast, sparsely populated land, it was one of the few annual occasions when a huge crowd gathered.

In addition to the festival's religious significance, it was also an important trade opportunity for farmers and nomads. Both had a plan for their families' annual food requirements, consequently, there was a brisk exchange of barley for butter, meat, and livestock.

Businessmen also sold leather boots, clothing, incense, fruit from India and Lhasa, tea and rice from Sichuan, and dried noodles and jujubes from Ziling. Locally made products included wood containers of various sorts, knives, saddles, and salt.

A huge crowd gathered in our village. We were very excited, whereas the nomad children were timid and cautious. We joyously crossed in and out of the crowd, market, and nomad camps as dogs ran about in fresh snow. Our parents encouraged us to take care of our 'little herdsmen friends'. We were very proud to take the nomad boys into the crowd and explain and show them what was what.

Some village boys played pranks on nomad girls by putting small stones on prayer wheels. When the girls circumambulated, they rotated the wheels in the course of their circumambulations and the small stones flew off and hit their heads.

Nomads easily got lost when they were in a crowd for there were many things they did not know. They said of themselves "I'm a

herdsman, I know little." Farmers said, "Naïve herdsmen know little." Such derogatory terms as 'stupid herdsmen' were common. I heard these stories about herdsmen:

### Making *Chang*

When a herdsman came to the Norbuling Mani Festival and stayed at a home, his host offered him *chang*.<sup>43</sup> After he became tipsy, he felt very comfortable and became loquacious. He took a stroll in the sheepfold and fell to the ground. After sobering up, he asked his host, "How do you make *chang*?"

The householder explained, "Cook barley, mix it with yeast, put it in a vat, and keep it warm."

The herdsman returned to his home and related his experience of intoxication to his family. He concluded by saying, "I want to make *chang*, I learned how to make it."

He boiled a big pot of barley, but couldn't find yeast. While wondering how to solve this problem, he noticed some horse dung. He took a pinch of the horse dung, mixed it with the cooked barley, put this into a vat, and wrapped it in cloth to retain the heat.

After a week, he opened the jar, filtered some liquid into his bowl, and gulped it down. Nothing happened so he drank a few more bowlfuls. Silently, he touched himself but felt nothing unusual. He said, "Oh! I nearly forgot. I was walking in the sheepfold with my new boots that day. Please bring me my new boots." He then pulled on his new boots, walked to the sheepfold, slid about on the sheep dung, and fell. He then excitedly exclaimed, "I am drunk."

### Killing a Flea

There were no fleas in the herding area and many herdsmen didn't know what fleas were. Stories of fleas sucking human blood and feasting on human flesh frightened them.

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<sup>43</sup> *Chang* is an alcoholic drink made from barley.

A herdsman came to the home of a farmer friend who prepared a room for him on the second floor and said, "There are fewer fleas here than downstairs."

The herdsman was very apprehensive and slept very lightly. At midnight, a cat came near him. He hit the cat's head with a stick and killed it.

The next day, the host came to his room and asked, "Were there any fleas?"

The herdsman threw the dead cat in front of the farmer and said confidently, "If there was only one flea, I have eliminated it."

### Eating Rice

A herdsman visited the home of a farmer friend who kindly offered him rice. The herdsman was shocked and said disappointedly, "Although I am a stupid herdsman, I won't eat ant eggs."

### Trade Between Herders And Farmers

Although, farmers verbally deprecated herdsmen with such stories, there was a relationship between the two based on trust, reciprocity, mutual gift-giving, and annual visits. Both farmers and herdsmen were proud to have friends in herding and agricultural areas.

The dimensions of this relationship were largely determined by production relationships that allowed herdsmen to obtain barley and farmers to obtain butter. A normal farmer family was proud to have a herdsman friend. If they did not, villagers thought the family was incapable, like a family without a man.

In late fall or early winter, villagers went to herding areas to obtain meat and butter and brought barley to visit their friends. Herdsmen gave sheep and yaks in return.

The more friends you had, the more benefits you received, thus having nomad friends was very important for farm families. Villagers tried their best to contact nomads, which was not easy. Young men who went to herding areas the first time braved strong wind and snow, and discovered the extent of their immature social

skills. This unforgettable experience was a critical part of the process of boys becoming men.

When villagers returned home with yaks, butter, and sheep, the livestock were slaughtered for winter food. My family consumed at least ten yaks and fifteen sheep in a winter.

This slaughtering of animals was controversial because herdsmen paid living animals for *mani* and then the *mani*-carver killed the animals. Why did herdsmen trade for *mani* stones? Maybe it was the value attached to this religious post-death activity. Adding *mani* stones to the ever-growing *mani* was thought to help the deceased's spiritual welfare. Despite protests from lama, the livestock-for-*mani* business continued.

Farmers said, "Stupid herdsmen are stupid! Why do herdsmen trade livestock for *mani* stones?"

The herdsmen always answered, "It is a question of devotion."

The number of animals bartered for *mani* stones was astounding. Geru went to Drito and Sershul annually looking for *mani* benefactors and his household slaughtered sixty to seventy yaks every winter. Accounts about him continue to be told in the Drito area today. For example, one day Geru met a shepherd in Drito grazing a flock of sheep on the pasture and shouted, "Hey! If you convince the sheep owner to barter something for some of these sheep, I'll reward you with some brown sugar."

The shepherd pointed to a black tent and said, "Come to that tent tomorrow and I'll try to persuade him."

Geru arrived at the tent the next day, respectfully peered through a gap in the tent door, and saw the shepherd sitting in the middle of a bed.

The shepherd said, "Please come in. I don't need your brown sugar. You can choose one of my biggest sheep."

Another time Geru was searching for *mani* customers, saw a boy grazing some livestock, and shouted, "Hey! Boy! How are your grandparents?" hoping that the boy would say one of his grandparents had died, and thus the family would be inclined to purchase *mani* stones for post-death activity.

The boy replied, "They are well."

Geru asked, "How are your parents?" hoping for a similar reply.

When the boy said, "They are well, too," Geru disappointedly sighed and left.

Norbuling Villagers obtained a lot of livestock, but never kept livestock that would have allowed them to have a sustainable livelihood. Winter was a time of abundant food with villagers giving little thought to the following spring. Food reserves were soon depleted. Many men then hunted wildlife for food.

Beside the village festival, there were two other noteworthy Dondrubling Monastery festivals. One was at the end of spring and the other was in winter.

Once Father took me to see one of our relatives in Dondrubling – the wealthy family of Botar, who was a trader all his life. He had been to Lhasa, Sichuan, and Ziling and was experienced in dealing with bandits. Several house servants were constantly busy in his kitchen and yard. Botar showed warm hospitality, leading us to the second floor living room where they usually didn't bring guests. Even their house servants were not allowed to enter this room.

I loved playing with my cousin, who was around my age. Hide-and-seek was a favorite game. My cousins were very mischievous and unlocked various rooms so there would be more places to hide. They were not afraid of their mother, despite her threats to tell their father to beat them.

I followed them and hid in the kitchen, toilet, storage rooms, under beds, on top of stored items, and so on. The storage rooms had many boxes of tea and India cloth. Thick dust lay atop those boxes, indicating Botar had not lacked money because these goods had not been touched in years.

## Bandits

Bandits were a serious problem for traders, but bandits also brought traders generous profits. Gawa is located in the Nakchu, Karmdze, and Golok area which, years ago, was the only route to Lhasa, Sichuan, and Ziling. Nakchu, Karmdze, and Golok. Being a bandit was regarded as ordinary in these areas.

Geographically, it was challenging to engage in commerce in Gawa. However, the enormous gap between wholesale prices in Ziling and retail prices in Gawa provided an incentive for commerce.

Possibility of generous profits encouraged many to engage in business. Some succeeded, some did not. Purchasing and selling were not difficult. The real problem was bandits. To avoid being looted, many people worked out an arrangement so that members of their trade caravan were well armed. A caravan generally consisted of fifty to several hundred people. Nevertheless, having a large number of people did not guarantee that the caravan would not be attacked. For instance, a caravan from my village and Dondrubling consisting of fifty people was attacked on their return from Ziling.

One night, not long after they had camped on a grassland in Golok, shooting and shouting came from somewhere in the darkness. Most of the camp's horses and mules bolted. Though no one was injured, some bags were missing.

Rebgong *ngakpa* were greatly feared. Adults said, "Don't provoke Rebgong *ngakpa*." For example, once when some Amdo pilgrims from Rebgong were on their way to Lhasa, their mules were stolen. A *ngakpa*<sup>44</sup> in the group announced, "If the bandits don't bring back my mules, I'll curse them until they are returned." The bandits experienced serious diarrhea after the *ngakpa* began reciting incantations and someone brought the mules back.

Bandit tales excited me. I thought, "What freedom bandits have. How romantic their lives! They don't need luxury. Horses and rifles are enough for them."

I remember a few lines from two bandit songs:

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Looking over my horse's up-turned ears  
Glimpsing my gun's muzzle when I turn  
Slouching proudly down one side of my horse

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<sup>44</sup> *Ngakpa* are versed in Tantra cults and masters of mysticism.

A little horse, a little man, and a little rifle  
When I've got them all I'm off to loot

Even though a bandit's life was romantic and many young men admired this way of life, danger was a constant companion and they were always on the lookout.

I knew a family who had several bandit sons. Father visited them once and noticed that they stayed at home during the daytime. When dusk came, they went to a camp in the mountains to sleep. When a man became a bandit, he never spent a night in his home.

A real man took revenge on bandits for their theft of his property. The wronged party followed the bandits' tracks. A veteran bandit would leave a message saying, "We're waiting for those chasing us (*ramda*<sup>45</sup>)." When bones cleaned of all meat were found, it suggested that the bandits were relaxed, even though they were being chased.

A bandit who stole from passersby near his own home place was not regarded as a true man, but as a bully. Real men went far from their home area to find victims. Golok bandits in the headwaters of the Mekong, Yangtze, and Yellow rivers were the most famous throughout the grassland.

Bandits mostly targeted livestock at night because they were relatively easy to steal and it was easier to avoid killing people. However, there were clashes and there were times when people were killed during bandit raids.

Many bandit groups were formed based on tribal divisions and one tribe stealing from another was common. For example, the Gyangse, Tsanggyu, Tritok, and Hashul tribes have a long history of feuding.

Conflict led to bilateral damage. Peace was always hoped for consequently, negotiation between warring tribes was significant. It often happened that two groups or two individuals reconciled. Both sides took an oath to not harm each other and became friends.

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<sup>45</sup> *Ramda* = to chase bandits.



Promises and oaths were taken seriously. Those who broke such commitments were said to "eat oaths and lick shit," and considered very bad people.

Promises were seldom broken, although some would stoop to anything to get what they wanted. Trayak, for example, could not defeat his opponent in face to face conflict. He pretended to want reconciliation and after his opponent trusted him, he killed him.

Bandits prepared horses, rifles, tents, pots, and *shengo*<sup>46</sup> before setting out on a looting expedition. Families with no men were expected to provide horses and other necessities. Generous bandits accepted such a family's contribution and, if the looting sortie was successful, shared the booty with all who had contributed. Certain bandits gave booty to the local chief in case of legal action to ensure that the local chief would help the bandits.

Bad luck came to bandits who stole from *ngakpa* and lama. The sixth Gyanak Incarnation Lama of Norbuling Mani went to Drito County looking for donors. One night, bandits stole seven of his horses and mules. When his companions were about to chase (*ramda*) them, Gyanak Incarnation Lama said, "Don't worry," covered his head with a coat, and began chanting an incantation called 'Bandits Lose'. Some days later, the bandits visited the lama's camp, unaware he was the horse's owner. Gyanak Incarnation Lama's companions then reclaimed the horses and mules. The bandits were astonished by Gyanak's power and became his devotees.

### A Novice Monk

After I could read Tibetan easily, Brother and I were sent to Dondrubling Monastery to be *bande*,<sup>47</sup> along with many other boys. An old monk taught us Tibetan reading comprehension and Tibetan calligraphy. We had to recite Buddhist chants from memory. He regularly examined us, was strict, insisted that we recite correctly and fluently, and arranged competitions that pushed us to study hard. He forced good students to ride on bad students' backs and then verbally

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<sup>46</sup> *Shengo* = an air-blower made of goat skin and a metal tube.

<sup>47</sup> *Bande* = monk novice.

humiliated their 'steeds'. Students were so afraid of being ridden in front of a crowd that they painstakingly prepared assignments.

Outside class, *bande* played, chased each other, fought each other, and shouted. Many boys became my friends.

I liked the young monks' gossip about everything. The most interesting things were such modern items as airplanes, ships, trucks, and motorcycles. Monks who had not been to India and Lhasa had little knowledge of such.

A talkative monk said, "I saw an iron horse called *bakbak* 'motorcycle'."

Another monk curiously asked, "What?"

The talkative monk said, "It's like a horse, but different. A man rides it and smoke comes out from its tail. It's very fast. I've seen airplanes, too."

A monk asked, "What's that?"

The talkative monk imaginatively said, "When an airplane flies over a mountain, its wings cut off the peaks."

An older monk commented:

Such news comes as no surprise. Such technical things are recorded in the *Kangyur* and *Tongyur*,<sup>48</sup> but such things are not useful for liberating sentient beings from the cycle of rebirth and bringing them to enlightenment. Airplanes can be used in war and a truck kills thousands of insects under its tires. Powering these things requires great amounts of energy. On the road to enlightenment, people should ignore such things, which is why Tibetans gave up on them. A certain lama made a wood plane, realized what would happen, and then destroyed it.

I believed what they said. I assumed that Tibetans could make all these things if they were so minded, but a higher spiritual calling restrained them.

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<sup>48</sup> The *Kangyur* is a collection of the Buddha's teaching. The *Tongyur* is a collection of commentaries on the Buddha's teaching.

## Trucks

My first glimpse of such modern things was a PLA truck that came to Norbuling. People talked about the trucks' arrival on a road Chinese workers had built.

I was at home when I heard a strange sound. We went outside and waited. I was really curious to know what, exactly, a truck was. Strange images flashed in my mind as the sound of approaching trucks grew louder.

Then we saw them. The dust behind the trucks and the loud sounds are unforgettable. Several trucks lumbered through my village. Villagers stood by the road and stared in shock at such huge moving masses. Horses fled. Dogs whimpered timidly. Children ran after the trucks. Adults talked of the surety of terrible accidents. Villagers watched the trucks until they vanished from sight while their sound lingered, sluggishly reverberating in the valley.

## A Mysterious Sound

People said that the Red Chinese would force Tibetans to disavow Buddhism, destroy Tibetan religion, force Tibetan children into Chinese schools, enlist all the men into the army, and force families to combine into one family. This was all frightening. People curiously predicted and imagined various futures.

The sound *bang* was heard periodically. It was hard to identify where it was coming from: "It signals a change in the times." "It is mountain deities fighting." No one knew exactly what it was. *Bang* was a mystery that made people anxious.

My village prayer wheel cried. Many people heard it screech. The nearest spring turned bloody. What ill omens! It all proved an approach of terrible times. Great social change was coming.

## Father's Double Identity

Father was enlisted by Drawu to be a guard and thus was exempt from paying taxes. I have an unforgettable image of Father holding a rifle and patrolling the Drawu Chief's house roof during Losar night

performances in the village center. He was on duty many times during the night-time performances because he was tough, honest, a good orator, and a good marksman. Often part of the Drawu Chief's caravan, Father had travelled to many places.

Father was also a *ngakpa* and wore his hair in long braids. He knew mantras to stop bleeding, treat eye diseases, and stop certain transmittable diseases. Father was often invited by villagers to their homes when they had health issues.

Animals sick with *tsagyuna* died quickly. People were forbidden to touch any part of an animal that died from this disease – even its hair and horns.

A common saying goes, "Mischievous boys get disease," which derives from mischievous boys often doing the opposite of what they are told. For example, if someone said, "Don't touch that dead animal," such boys would surely touch it.

When such diseases killed an animal, it was buried unless *ngakpa* or those who'd had this disease and thus were immune to it, were contacted. The man who butchered the dead animal was given half the meat. The other half was taken by animal's owner and cooked. Cooked meat could not infect anyone. This cooked meat was more delicious than from a regularly slaughtered animal. Father sometimes returned home with the meat of half a yak because he had performed this service.

It was particularly dangerous when a goat or yak-cow cross died from this disease. A neighbor contracted this disease from his dead female yak-cow hybrid and had many pimples on his skin, indicating that if he did not receive prompt treatment he would die. Father recited an incantation called *khlorlo chedak* 'licking a wheel'. Father wanted to test if he had recited this incantation enough times for it to be effective, and licked a piece of red hot metal. It made a sizzling sound and Father felt no pain, which meant that it was effective. Father continued reciting and blowing at his patient, who soon recovered completely.

For ulcerating eye diseases, Father prepared a bowl of water and outlined a Tibetan letter on his palm with barley grain. He moved his palm nine times clockwise and nine times counterclockwise around the afflicted eye while reciting incantations, and then put the

grain into the bowl of water. The ulcer miraculously vanished and appeared on the grain in the water. Father knew many incantations and one of his younger cousins, Trashicho, knew even more.

Trashicho had a thick mustache that he kept neatly curled. He was a locally well-known *ngakpa* and had powers such that he could cause a woman holding a milk bucket to go looking for her bucket. He could also join a shovel head and shovel handle without touching either. I yearned to learn Father's incantations, but I knew he wouldn't pass them on to me. He thought they were only useful in a secular sense, had nothing to do with the ultimate goal of enlightenment, and that I, a prospective monk, shouldn't spend my limited lifetime learning such things.

A man visited my home who had learned mantras with Father at the same time and from the same teacher. When I asked him to teach me an incantation, he did and I wrote it down. After he left, I recited it for several days and then realized I would have to repeat it many more times before the incantation had power. My desire to master the power of incantations then faded and I didn't try again.

### Hydrophobia

Dogs were generally treated kindly. If a boy threw a stone at a poor dog for fun, old women scolded him. Food was regularly distributed to poor homeless dogs in the village. During the fourteenth, fifteenth, and thirtieth days of each lunar month, the amount of food given to dogs was doubled. Locals never ate dogs nor killed them for entertainment.

A common expression goes, "A dog is ready for a human incarnation and a chief is ready to go to Hell." Those bitten by a mad dog acted just like a dog. They barked day and night, tried to bite others, and barked until they died.

Gyanak Incarnation Lama once went to Drito and camped at an abandoned nomad camp with his followers. They heard a dog barking from a cage made of yak dung, investigated, and found a man wrapped inside a blanket. Gyanak Incarnate Lama ordered his servants to release him and then he cured him of his hydrophobia.

They continued their trip the next day and eventually came to a nomad camp. All the nomads ran away when they saw the 'mad' man with the group. Then the man who had been mad shouted that he had been cured by a lama. The nomads stared suspiciously, but the presence of the lama was strong evidence that he was telling the truth. The man then approached a nomad family and embraced them, weeping emotionally. He was the father of the family. After contracting hydrophobia, he had tried to bite everyone. Giving up all hope that he could be cured, his family had bound him in a blanket and abandoned him in the yak dung cage.

After this, Gyanak Incarnation Lama was renowned in the Drito Area and locals became his major donors.

Hydrophobia was not difficult to cure if it was treated early. After a boy in my village got hydrophobia, his father brought him to Dondrubling Monastery to see a lama, who prevented the boy from breathing during the time it took a monk to walk fifty paces. The boy then breathed on a copper mirror, covering it with condensation that was in the pattern of a dog, indicating just how ill the boy was. The clearer the figure of a dog was, the more serious the patient's illness. The lama successfully treated the boy with incantations and drugs.

Sometimes a fierce dog was sighted that arched its back. Its tail sagged and curled between its legs, such that the tip of the tail nearly touched its stomach. Such dogs were immediately identified as mad. Children ran into houses and men gathered near the dog holding sticks and stones. People neither used metal rods nor guns to kill mad dogs because it was believed hydrophobia was transmitted through metal.

### Rich and Poor

There were poor and rich families in my village. The amount of food a family had was not the measure of 'wealth'. Some 'poor' families ate better food than some 'rich' families. Reputation, genealogy, and property were important criteria. It was generally conceded that rich people had better manners than poor people.

Property was a measure of wealth and status, thus family's were eager to accumulate more. During festivals, people wore all their

valuable ornaments, demonstrating who was rich and who was poor. Groups of old ladies gossiped about the dazzling, richly dressed people. They seemed to know the precise history of each piece of jewelry.

Generally, men were the heads of families and decided family affairs without discussing anything with their spouses. Nevertheless, husbands could not deal with their wives' jewelry as they wished. The most valuable ornament was the woman's necklace that she had inherited through a matrilineal line of descent. It was absolutely her property and her husband could not gain control of it unless this decision was based on the couple having children and a harmonious marriage that had lasted some years.

Necklaces and other ornaments directly influenced women's lives because they were seen as a large part of their attractiveness and their capital. Some men preferred a rich ugly girl with valuable ornaments over a pretty girl who was poor. Owning valuable ornaments also gave a woman confidence in what might happen if her marriage failed or her husband died.

Ornaments also determined a girl's status in her husband's home. A common saying goes, "If you have property, you are Uncle's nephew. If you don't have property, you are Uncle's slave."

When sons reached marriageable age, their parents focused on potential brides with ample dowries. In contrast, the girls' parents' major concern was the prospective groom's personality. Good manners were thought to be strong indication of social status.

A rich family with many daughters generally went into decline because the parents generously gave family property to the girls when they married. Many men were monks and this made it difficult for women to find husbands. Parents were very concerned about their daughters' marriages.

A woman's life was very constrained. Ideally, she was to be beautiful and rich; know how to spin wool, milk, and make various dairy foods; dry dung for fuel; and be capable of doing a host of other things to keep a household running smoothly. This work continued their entire lives.

Men had more options. Becoming a monk was the brightest. Monks received respect, regardless of their family's status and wealth.

Monks also had less to worry about in terms of family responsibilities, led ostensibly admirable lives, and the aura of being engaged in significant endeavors added luster.

A common saying goes, "A layman must have a rifle, horse, and physical strength." This describes the relatively easygoing lives of men.

In contrast, the many women who could not find partners led difficult lives. They might have worked as a house servant for a rich person on the basis of a simple oral contract with the rich person providing accommodation, food, a robe for summer, and a robe for winter. There might have been no further compensation.

I observed that the richer the family, the more cruelly the house servants were treated. For example, my relative, Botar, lived near my home. His house servants knew that if they went to the second floor without his permission, they would be seriously reprimanded.

Some house servants worked very hard and were given very simple food while the members of the household they worked for ate much better. In such homes, the servants' beds were downstairs where it was colder. They were the first to get up in the morning and the last to go to bed in the evening. They were timid and worked silently in a corner of the home.

In other homes, the family members and the house servants ate the same food, slept in rooms of the same condition, and the housewife and daughters did the same amount of work as the house servants.

Sometimes house servants were dissatisfied. In one case for example, a family hired a girl to herd sheep. One day, the weather turned bad after she had gone to the mountain to herd. The owner sympathized with her having to herd in such bad weather and, after supper, kept the best piece of meat for her. When she returned, she looked at the meat and complained, "A house servant receives such meat! I can't imagine what kind of meat *they* had."

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A military camp settled in my village. The people were not uniformed and not part of the PLA, but they were armed. They were known as



'territory keepers' and encouraged local people to join them, but only a few poor locals willingly did so. Although there were generous benefits, no one liked being called the 'scum of a nation'.

Certain orphans and poor boys that suddenly had a position with a little power from the Chinese became very active, but not thoughtful. A common saying goes, "A poor man flaps his knees a hundred times against a horse's side to make it go faster." They were used to living at a very low level and being scorned, but now wore Chinese suits or Tibetan robes and PLA hats. People were frightened of them. Some soon learned functional Chinese and became translators.

### Journey to the Holy City

In autumn 1957, Father followed the Drawu Chief's caravan to Lhasa. This presented an excellent opportunity for Brother and me to go to the Sakya Sect headquarters for an initiation ritual. Mother prepared a small bag of fried bread and Father bought a mule to carry baggage. We also took three horses. Our caravan consisted of about fifty people, mostly novices and their fathers, some traders, and the Drawu Chief's entourage.

Three men from Patang and five men from Gakla Village and its neighbor villages joined the caravan as part of their service to the Drawu Chief. Tutob Wangyal, Kunga Trinley, and Shakya from villages near the Yangtze River joined the caravan. They were selected through lottery held in the village to provide service to the chief's entourage. Kunga Trinley was a big, strong man and could easily load big, heavy bags on yaks. He held me with one hand and another boy with the other hand and easily lifted us into the air.

Trashy Gyamtso was the caravan leader who decided when to leave and when and where to stop. Phuntsok was in his early fifties and originally from the Gyarong Area. He had the ability to keep the caravan pack mules in line by loudly calling their names. When a mule attempted to walk parallel with the line of mules, he would melodiously shout something like "Lucky White Mouth" and the named mule would seem to understand and line up again.

We left our village in the early morning. Mother went with us for about a kilometer and prayed for our safe journey. When she stopped walking she stood and watched until I could no longer see her. Her figure on the horizon at dawn stayed in my memory during the entire journey.

I was used to riding horses, but not for long distances. I quickly wished that we would pitch camp for the night. Around noon, the caravan stopped and everyone began unloading our animals. Father ordered Brother and me to remove the saddles and other things. As I was struggling to unfasten my horse's saddle, Brother finished and turned to help me. Father sternly stopped him and later told me many stories about his first time with a caravan.

Our group scurried about collecting dry yak dung, pitching tents, cooking, and driving animals out to graze. I was uncomfortable doing nothing. I was afraid other boys would laugh at me for being lazy. I tried to keep busy.

Tea was soon boiling and bowls were pulled from robe pouches as we gathered around the teapot and made *tsampa*. If a boy was lazy and didn't come punctually, the cook purposely poured out remaining tea to teach lazy boys a lesson.

Father, Brother, and I next made a cozy sleeping area surrounded by a pile of baggage, the preferred sleeping arrangement. The baggage broke the wind and we could also respond more quickly if there was a bandit attack or our animals stampeded. We also saved the time it would have taken to pitch a tent and later take it down and pack it up.

We cooked yak meat, mutton, and bread at four o'clock. After lunch, adults prepared our baggage, fixed broken bags, and spun yak hair rope. I played with other candidate monks and tended our horses.

In the evening, I and the other boys rounded up the horses and mules, brought them back to camp, and then had a supper of noodles. Suppertime was always very late. We sat around the fire and ate. The light from the yak-dung fire illuminated people's faces with a gleaming luster. We put out the fire after we recited evening prayers and went to bed. The dark blue sky, glowing stars, and the fresh cold air mesmerized me.

When we reached a gorge full of twists and turns in Gegye, we saw a big bear on the other side of the Mekong River. Someone from our caravan shot at the bear and might have hit it. A few days later, we reached the Boulder of Prosperity in Sokde Territory, which was the halfway point on the journey to Lhasa. According to a folktale, a legendary trader named Norbu Zangpo met his son at the Boulder of Prosperity.

Trashi Gyamtso decided our caravan would rest one day at the Boulder of Prosperity. I played and looked for fun with other novices. We found many thumb-sized stones resembling seashells. They were called "sparrow head" stones. On certain auspicious days, people reported hearing the sparrow head stones chirping.

A terrible sound woke me up from a comfortable dream. "Get up! Wake up!" Father said repeatedly. I reluctantly opened my eyes. It was still very dark. Stars shimmered in the sky. I tried to move. Frost droplets were on my neck. I wanted to continue sleeping – even for one more minute – but Father insisted. I put on my robe and fetched my horse. I picked up the cold saddle. It was so cold I felt that my entire body was powerless. I struggled. I knew Father wouldn't help me nor would he allow Brother to help me.

The young men who were not monk novices had to load all the baggage on the yaks and mules. Their fathers and uncles deliberately refused to help. Two people loaded a heavy bag on a yak at the same time. They might have been father and son or uncle and nephew. When a young man could hardly lift their end of the bag, an adult would grab the young man's hands firmly while pretending to grab the bag's straps.

Everything was done before dawn. There was no set time for breakfast and for rest. Still, everything was done on time.

I never seemed to have enough sleep in the morning. I closed my eyes as I rode my horse and dozed, but woke up when the horse moved unexpectedly. I wore boots, but I had no trousers and no long underwear. The cold air easily moved up my robe and enveloped my thighs, which I clenched tight against the horse to keep warm.

When the sun rose from behind the ever-present mountains, I was entirely alert. Exhausted from hunger and thirst, I hoped we would soon pitch camp.

At around eleven AM, the caravan stopped and pitched camp. We had a meal, which was the most delicious I've ever had. We started marching again at four AM and continued until eleven AM. We traveled in this way to give the animals enough time to graze and rest.

Some early mornings, certain boys could hardly wake up. They were slow and late, but we never waited for them. Once I was anxious about a missing boy, but Father said, "Don't worry, he'll be fine."

Sure enough, he caught up with us that afternoon and later told me, "I heard them trying to wake me, but I never imagined they would abandon me. When I got up, I found only my horse remained." This was a good lesson. I realized eating, sleeping, and regular necessary work had to be done on time otherwise we would be left behind.

We crossed many mountain passes. I don't remember most of the mountain names, but I do remember Nyanchen Tanglha,<sup>49</sup> which is famous throughout Tibet. There were stone and yak dung piles on passes put up by passersby. I raced up with other boys, picked up stones and yak dung and added them to the piles, and recited scriptures. Boys always reached the piles first. Adults followed.

Each time we nearly reached a mountain pass, our caravan would suddenly become active after sluggish marching. The intensity of devotion to the mountain deities was manifested by everyone dismounting, taking off their hats, throwing back braided hair hanging down on their chests, and racing up to the peak while reciting scriptures, shouting, whooping, praying, tossing *lungta*<sup>50</sup> 'wind horses' into the sky, and adding stones and yak dung to the pile. The prayers glorified all the renowned mountains throughout Tibet. I prayed:

*Kikisoso*,<sup>51</sup> glory to the gods!  
Glory to the ancestral sovereigns  
Glory to the warrior spirits  
Glory to the divine body

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<sup>49</sup> With an elevation of 7,162 meters, it is located in the center of the Tibet Autonomous Region.

<sup>50</sup> A piece of paper printed with scripture.

<sup>51</sup> *Kikisoso* = war cry; a shout praising deities.

Glory to the local deities  
Glory to the mountain deities

*Kikisoso*, glory to the gods!  
Glory to the tiger mountain to the right  
Glory to the leopard mountain to the left  
Glory to Nyanchen Tanglha in the center  
Glory to Anye Machen to the east  
*Kikisoso*, glory to the gods!

Venerating mountain deities brings virtue and luck to those who worshiped them. Every man has an invisible gloriole. When it dims, everything about him becomes unpropitious and ends in failure. On the contrary, the more you venerate mountain deities, the more radiant your gloriole and the more propitious and successful you become.

The weather on the high Plateau was very cold in late autumn and our caravan easily crossed many frozen rivers, including the Mekong and Salween. Snow and wind were regular companions. I didn't like the frozen snowy land and wind that made it difficult for me to comfortably view the landscape. The bright sun shining on the snow-covered land filled my eyes with tears, but I did enjoy the snowy nights. All was gentleness and tranquility before it snowed. The snowflakes fell gracefully, falling on my face, Brother's forehead, and Father's massive leonine hair. Brother and I focused on flakes falling from the gray sky until we were bored, then I put my head inside my robe and slept.

I could hardly move when Father woke me up after a snowfall. Everything was covered by thick snow that pressed down on me as though several blankets were covering me. I have never slept so well in my life. I felt very warm and comfortable. I almost wanted to say "No" to Father. When I moved, the snow tumbled into my robe and against my skin. Shivering with cold, I felt disoriented.

We never encountered bandits, but an unexpected incident did occur late one night when hundreds of our animals stampeded through camp, creating a din as they turned over pots and kettles. The night was full of clattering hooves, neighs, and bawling. Father told Brother

and me to sleep. I knew the leather bags firmly surrounding us would protect us from immediate danger. I put my head inside my robe and closed my eyes through the chaos. Father thought we had been attacked by bandits, stuck a rifle through our piled up leather bags, and looked for something to aim at.

Gradually the commotion dimmed with the clattering hooves of the departing animals. There were no rifle shots and no shouting. A horse or a mule had probably, for some unknown reason, suddenly bolted, sending all the animals into a stampede.

We chased after our animals and it took us a long while to round them up. After sunrise we discovered our only casualty was a mule strangled to death on its tether. Everything was in disorder. A tent was torn and ropes restraining the animals were broken. We repaired these, packed up, and continued our journey.

We passed Nagchuka, Sharikog, and various mountain passes before arriving in Phanpo Valley, which is a farming area where one of our men had fought a local farmer. Our man grabbed the local man's turquoise earring, tearing his earlobe. Others separated them. The local farmers did not take revenge.

The magnificent Potala Palace sitting on its hill in the city center was first sight of Lhasa was. Fog draped the city with the lofty Potala jutting above. We emotionally removed our hats and murmured prayers. I was both proud and emotional to approach Lhasa, which I had dreamed of for so long.

Lhasa means 'holy place' and, in my mind, it was an equivalent paradise. I was expecting beauty and romance as we entered Lhasa but instead, I saw many camps around Lhasa filled with worshipers and many very poor people from throughout Tibet.

Father rented a room from local residents for the three of us. We put our luggage there and settled in. It was difficult to keep animals in Lhasa so we located a valley a half-day from Lhasa where we pitched camp. Our group members tended the animals in turn.

The next day we went to the Jokhang, the holiest temple in Tibet. It is the most important for worshipers because it is believed that the statue received a blessing from Buddha consequently, worshipping it is the same as venerating Buddha himself.

When we reached the temple, people were in a long queue. The temple seemed to draw us ever nearer in a sacred, solemn atmosphere. Devotees prayed emotionally. With eyes squinted shut, they brushed their foreheads on the stone before Buddha Shakyamuni. Wanting to make time for other supplicants, two resident monks urged people to move on.

When it came my turn, I closed my eyes, overwhelmed by the palpable sacred atmosphere, which was more intense when I prostrated. Father and Brother did the same and Father emotionally recited prayers.

A few days later we continued westward, on toward Gyaltse. We saw the castle and wall on the hilltop from far way. We passed Gyaltse and reached a place where an avalanche had resulted in a glacial lake breaking its banks, washing away downstream villages, livestock, and wild animals. Finally we reached our ultimate destination - the Sakya Sect headquarters. We worshipped at many monasteries and temples on the way and eventually reached Ngoru Monastery. As candidate monks of the Sakya Sect, we felt greatly honored to have at last reached this sacred site.

Father bought monk robes for Brother and me from local people. These robes were not made for winter so we had to endure the cold winter weather wearing these thin cloth robes. There was a great market for monk robes because almost every day, Sakya Sect novices from throughout Tibet came to this place. Locally, butter and meat were inadequate so we easily exchanged some of our butter and meat for monk robes. The amount of butter and meat we had was limited by the long distance we had come from home. People usually sold or traded excess wool, meat, and butter in Lhasa.

I noticed a young man from a village near the Yangtze River who had reached Ngoru Monastery at the same as we did. I had first seen him a few days after the beginning of our journey. He was weeping and traveling alone. He held a spear tied with a scripture flag and had a small bag on his back. He finally reached Ngoru Monastery to complete this ritual of manhood.

Around 400 monk novices from Kham and Central Tibet gathered at the main hall of Ngoru Monastery. When the gate opened, novices pushed and tried to squeeze by each other to reach the front. I

was small and always got in front. The floor was made of a concrete-like material made with using traditional techniques. Dozens of long, narrow seats for monks were laid out in rows, like fingers of a hand. We were not allowed to sit on the seats during the teaching. We sat barefoot on the floor, filling the gaps between two rows. I wore my skirt which I had folded inside out and wrapped around my waist, so that it only reached my ankles. It resembled a *dobdob's* costume. People referred to me as "Little Dobdob" and I thought of myself as a *dobdob*.

Our root guru's teaching was long and boring. I could not understand the language. I felt cold and sleepy. Sometime, I saw an indentation on our guru's bald head as he lost control, nodded off, and bent his head.

There were two small rugs on two corners. We struggled to sit on the rugs during the break. I was reach the rugs by jumping over rows of long seats. Four people could sit on each rug.

The skin of my exposed ankles dried in the cold air. My legs felt painful when they warmed up after I had been in bed for some minutes at night.

The monk novices often fought each other to show how masculine they were. Sometime two groups from two different areas fought each other for no reason. Ngoru Monastery was located on a hill with a narrow valley on either side. Sometime two novices would go fight in the west valley to avoid punishment from the monastery. Fighting was forbidden. Violators were punished by canings.

A young monk in the monastery served tea to the novices. He was nice to me and always shook the cooper tea pot before pouring tea, which meant more butter oil went into my bowl. Once, he and a monk from Gawa fought. Two *dobdob* from the monastery then slashed his bare buttocks with whips. He did not make any sound. They did not beat the other one. I don't know why.

A monk from Gawa in his twenties had been in Ngoru Monastery for a year. He led some Gawa monks to fight a group of monks from Dege. He was a good fighter and could fight two enemy monks at the same time. After 1960, he escaped to Nepal and lived there until he was killed by Nepalese Maoists in the late 1990s.



One time, a monk from Dramgo from Kham was hit on the head with an adult hand-sized iron key during a fight. Blood ran down his face. A scar was very visible on his shaved head.

When we needed to pee, we had to raise our hands for permission. A novice from my home place who had a small blue birthmark on his left cheek dared not ask permission. Instead, he peed into his bowl under his monk skirt and drank two bowls of his own urine.

Brother and I attended the initiation for monks, which required several months. First, I attended a ritual anyone could attend. A lama sat in front of us and eloquently explained basic Buddhist regulations - we should try to do good thing, respect monks and nuns, and practice religious exercises if time allowed. The lama asked each of us, "Can you do this?"

Everyone answered, "I can."

The lama asked me, "Are you happy to cut your hair?"

I said, "Yes. I am happy to cut my hair," and he then symbolically cut a little of my hair.

The lama chanted and said, "You should imagine a light embodying a Buddha image in front of you. Your basic guru and Buddha are the same in nature, a homogeneous and coherent substance. Imagine a red light shining upon your forehead from the Buddha or guru."

A colorful scarf around the lama's neck was attached to a Buddha image. He put the image on my head and said, "The red light goes through your entire body. You will absorb the light embodying Buddha. Buddha and you will perfectly merge." He continued chanting as I considered what he had said.

The lama said, "Now you have received Buddha's blessing. You have become a follower of Buddha."

Custom dictated that each novice monk should have two religious friends. This group of three took part in a paramount ceremony that made the candidate a real monk. Sworn-monk-brothers were to be more important than secular friends and relatives.

Maintaining a harmonious relationship between monk brothers was regarded as a key moral duty, otherwise all religious practices were a waste of time and effort. To this end, it was best to choose

monk brothers far from your home place to avoid entangling relationships.

Many novices thronged noisily in the monastery yard, hoping to find religious brothers. I was there for the same purpose. Faced with many same-aged strangers, I didn't know who to choose. The man uniformed teenage strangers all looked the same to me and all were potential religious friends. "How do I choose?" I wondered.

I hesitated near a boy and stared at him. He was obviously looking for brothers too. The most difficult and easiest decision coexisted in my heart. I quietly asked, "Can you be my friend?" and he gladly agreed. We stood in a corner and easily found a third partner, and introduced ourselves. We called to our relatives and introduced them.

Father explained more about me and my two new friends' relatives did the same for them. One of my new friends, Tsultrim Dargye, was from Chamdo. The other was from Dege.

I invited my two new brothers to my room where Father cooked wild yams and butter soup. They subsequently invited me to each of their rooms for the same food. Other apprentice monks were doing the same.

The three of us went as a group to see our tutor, held an alms bowl, and took an oath holding the edge of our tutor's cassock. This tutor was our root lama. We were never to betray him. If we truly believed his instruction and there was great trust between the three monk brothers, the efficacy of our rituals and empowerments would never fade, regardless of how the world might change in future.

It was possible that a novice might not find a religious friend and be a leftover. Everyone worried about being a leftover. A leftover novice then had no choice but to be friends with *tsatsa* - a clay deity or stupa. No one wanted to be a leftover.

Every three novices formed a group of religious brotherhood. They then chanted scriptures that they often recited before meals. I memorized these two sets of scriptures and our group easily passed. Many novices couldn't chant well and suffered great embarrassment in public.

I believed that the Sakya Sect empowerments and blessings had the strength to cleanse sin and disease, leaving a clear transparent body and emptiness of mind. I was proud to be a monk and have the opportunity to belong to the Sakya Sect. I believed I had already crossed the threshold into ultimate enlightenment, although nothing miraculous suddenly happened to me.

While I was in Ngoru Monastery, our root lama taught the principles of Buddhism and other lamas gave us empowerments and blessings. My daily life then quickly became a monotonous collection of lessons and chanting.

A most unusual thing happened. The monastery announced before nightfall that the Sakya *bakmo* had fled and warned everyone to be careful of encountering her at night. It was explained to me that *bakmo* meant 'female mask' and referred to a protector deity – a very powerful female demon bound by oath to the Sakya Sect who obeys their commands.

I saw the *bakmo*, a ferocious mask image in one temple corner with protruding canine teeth and alarmingly long, sagging breasts. This hideous figure was bound with iron chains that made her more vividly frightful.

It was not the first time the Sakya *bakmo* had fled the temple. I asked a monk, "Is this ferocious deity image physically breaking chains?"

He replied, "Of course not."

The smell of burning horn permeating the air signaled the *bakmo* was near. People avoided venturing outside at night during this time. If they did go outside, they held a stick of burning incense to ward off the *bakmo*.

That night a fierce wind howled through the darkness. Doors slammed shut and dust filtered through spaces around windows as the image of that hideous deity flashed in my mind. I imagined she was trying to enter my room in the form of wind. I told myself I should be fearless because I was a monk.

The next day the wind quieted and all was tranquil. Families cooked breakfast as smoke from cooking fires lethargically enveloped the valley. The night wind had swept dust away from the small path leading to the main temple. As I walked along that path, I noticed

people gathered around the stupa. I soon learned that the *bakmo* had cut off the top of the stupa.

We left the Sakya monastery for Lhasa a few months later. Before leaving, I said goodbye to my sworn brothers. We hoped to meet again in Lhasa or in our respective home places.

We celebrated Losar 'Tibetan New Year' at this monastery. There was nothing memorable or fun about it. After spending the coldest three months of winter at Ngoru Monastery, we left for Lhasa. Many novices and their guardians started their journey back to their homes. Novices would follow streams to find watermills to beg for roasted barley. One time, we knocked on the door of a watermill and a young man came out wearing a turquoise earring. His hair was coated in tsampa flour, making him resemble a gray-haired old man. When he saw us, he nervously gave us a dipper full of roasted barley.

People were scared of a novice caravan. Novices did not have much food from their home with them because of the distance of travel. They bought or begged food. A group of hungry young men would do anything to get food and no one dared refuse them.

When we reached Shigatse, some of our men fought locals, who reported to local policemen. The policemen arrested participants. We paid some fines and then the detainees were released. The Tibet policemen's uniforms were green robes and special hats.

A wooden ferryboat on the south bank of the Yarlung Tsangpo River charged a fee per trip. For this reason, we put as much as we could on the boat. The boat was parallel to a steel wire strung between the two banks. A few boatmen counted, "One, two, three," and then pulled the wire. This moved the boat forward. The ferry was big enough to accommodate twenty animals, fifteen people, and a great amount of other baggage.

The boat sank as the weight on the boat increased until water almost came into the boat. Someone said, "Water's coming in. Water's coming in." I thought we were going to drown. Fortunately, the boat reached the bank, relieving everyone.

We finally got to Lhasa again and stayed there until summer. Lhasa was a fun place with many shops and restaurants. The Drawu chief's younger brother, Gedun, was four years older than I. One time he walked along the street and met some Horpa boys, who tried to

bully him. He ran toward our place, chased by three Horpa boys. I saw them and fought the Horpa boys until some adults separated us. Gedun liked me after I became his friend. He wanted me to be his companion and protect him from bullies.

Every late afternoon, he would make a big bowl of *tsampa* with a lot of butter. He could not eat it all and shared it with me. I was accustomed to wait for his *tsampa*. One hot afternoon, I went to swim in the Kyichu River alone. Gedun sent two men to look for me on Barkor Street. Finally, a man found me at the Kyichu River bank and said, "The chief's brother sent me to look for you. I searched for you all afternoon."

When I met Gedun, he said, "I've been looking for you all afternoon." There was no particular reason for him to search for me other than he was bored.

Father had some Chinese silver coins, which he converted into Tibetan currency that we used in the market. Father was careful with his money and only bought what we needed.

The Drawu Chief and other men often played mahjong. Ngodrub from my village always stood behind the chief, watching the game. Father did not know how to play and also was not interested in watching. They played mahjong almost every day. I watched them from the door gap before lunch and made sounds to get their attention. Sometime, they called me inside for lunch.

Some Gawa people had lived in Lhasa for years. They knew that their chief's entourage was in Lhasa. Many visited us with gifts. Yang Trashi, a trader from Dondrubling, lived in Lhasa. He traveled between Lhasa and the Gawa Area. He invited our group and some other Gawa people who lived in Lhasa to a fancy restaurant. There were four round tables in the restaurant. Ten people sat around each table. Yang Trashi sat next to the Drawu Chief and ordered the best food that the restaurant had. Many dishes were brought to each table. We had chopsticks and spoons to eat with, but many of us did not know how to use chopsticks. The food was very delicious. I had never seen nor imagined such food. Everyone liked the dishes. Everyone guessed what the sea cucumber dish was. I don't remember if the restaurant owner was Chinese or Tibetan. We were also offered liquor and *chang* as well. Ngodrub became tipsy and sang a song praising the

*chang*. His song was so long that I wished he would stop singing. Father never drank alcohol so Brother and I also did not drink.

Yang Trashi said to the chief that he also invited some Gawa people who lived in Lhasa, but they had not come. Father and other men commented that Yang Trashi's generosity might have embarrassed other Gawa people, which explained why they had not shown up.

Every day was sunny. I often went to the Norbulingkha 'Treasure Park' and played with other boys. Gardeners watered the park grounds and trees.

I played hide-and-seek with Kham and Lhasa boys. Shrubs were good places to hide. One day a boy about five years old joined us. His father was the master of the Sakya Sect and was sitting near us. I tried to make conversation with the little boy and play with him but he wanted, instead, to touch the water and accidentally fell into a pool. Nearby children shouted and the Sakya Sect master jumped out of his chair, clumsily came over, and plucked his son out of the water. I was terrified that he would scold me, but he did not.

We walked around Lhasa. A large impoverished population lived in tents and under shelters. I saw a father and his three sons drinking tea when we passed by one poor family. After they finished the tea, they ate the tea leaves in the bottom of the teapot. I thought they must be starving because boiled tea leaves were fed to livestock in my home.

Some beggars were prisoners with their feet in chains. Although they could go around Lhasa and beg during the day, they had to return to prison at night. I heard the prison was located at the foot of the Potala. Most were serving life sentences since the death penalty was forbidden, but their incarceration ended if someone bought their freedom from the government. This often happened during the holy month of Saga Dawa.

One day, a sick man was brought to a room next to our room. This patient had suffered heatstroke in India and his condition did not improve. He moaned until the second he died and then two men took him to the sky burial place the same day. Lhasa people took their dead as soon as they stopped breathing in fear the corpse would become a

zombie. A zombie could not bend down so doorways were not high in Lhasa.

We also saw an object covered with a white scarf by the road. People placed money on it. "What is it?" I asked.

Father said, "It is a homeless corpse." When a certain amount of money accumulated on the corpse, funeral carriers collected the money and then took the corpse to the sky burial site.

Goods were from India and China. We visited many shops selling traditional decorations for women and various religious objects.

Father was interested in purchasing daily necessities and also wanted to make some extra money. He went to the camp where our animals were and hunted a musk deer. He did this secretly because this was against Tibetan law. After he killed the deer, he gave the meat to the people tending our livestock, returned to Lhasa with the musk gland, and sold the musk for a good price.

Three months later we left Lhasa for our home with the same caravan, although the Drawu Chief planned to come later. Summer on the Plateau was pleasant with its many vast, green grasslands. It was very different than our travel through snowy landscape of months earlier.

Crossing rivers was a constant challenge. When we reached the south bank of the Mekong, we encountered flooding from heavy rain. The muddy Mekong rolled before us. I felt hopeless, but I didn't have to worry because crossing was adults' responsibility. After discussion we followed the river for quite a long while until we reached a crossing. We first forced across the yaks and mules. They are naturally good swimmers and easily crossed the river with heavy baggage on their backs. The river was so deep that the animals' heads and the baggage they carried seemed to merge on the river surface.

We took off our robes, put them into leather bags, and tied them to the saddles. When some had already crossed the river, Father checked my saddle to ensure it was secure. After I mounted the horse, Father said, "Don't sit on the saddle. Sit behind it. Hold the saddle tightly and never let go." He emphasized again, "Don't let go whatever happens."

I held the saddle tightly and gripped the horse with my thighs as it reluctantly moved into the river. I felt its hooves stepping on riverbed rocks. As the river deepened, the sense of the hooves touching the riverbed was fading. My body was steadily sinking deeper and deeper into the cold water. I held the saddle even more tightly. My horse knew it couldn't swim directly against the current so it was moving diagonally across the river. When the horse jerked, I nearly fell off and then realized we had crossed the deepest part of the river. Gradually, my body emerged from the water and I knew we had successfully crossed.

Some held their horses' tails when they crossed, rather than sit on the horse. I saw their heads following the horse heads above the muddy water as the horses pulled them to the bank.

There were no accidents and no baggage was missing. Shivering with cold and disoriented, I took out my dry robe from the leather bag and put it on. After we camped, we grazed our yaks and mules on hills. Some bags were soaked and we put wet goods such as rolls of silk and India-made woolen cloth, our winter robes, and other commodities on rocks to dry. Unexpectedly, we saw around twenty armed Chinese wearing black clothing coming toward us. They stopped some distance from us.

### No Food After the Night Raid

One of our companions, Kongkong, knew the translator, who called Kongkong to his tent. Father said to Kongkong, "Leave your rifle here if you want to go." Kongkong went there with empty hands and the translator said, "If you are clever you will give up your arms."

Kongkong shouted from the Chinese camp, "They asked me to tell you to surrender."

Later six soldiers with small machineguns, led by the Tibetan translator, came close to our tent, but Kongkong did not come with them. Father and the other men worried about what would happen next. Tutob Wangyal said, "We don't need to see them. One person should go meet them to see what they want."

Meanwhile, Tutob Wangyal and Father sat cross-legged, with their rifles aimed at likely targets through tent openings. Rinyang, an



older man from Gokla went to meet them. I saw Rinyang was talking loudly while waving his right hand repeatedly in the air, as if he was arguing for something. I could not hear much of what he said, but I heard words and phrases like "I used to think" "mother country" "benefactor" "how could you..." ...

There was no progress in the negotiations until the Chinese side compromised when the curtain of night had fallen. We drove back our animals and boiled tea for supper. Rinyang said, "There won't be a problem tonight. They promised. We will continue negotiating tomorrow."

"Who knows what will happen tonight?" some men countered.

"There won't be any problems because they promised," the representatives replied.

A common saying goes, "Skepticism is a fatal weakness of Chinese; trusting is a fatal weakness of Tibetans."

Tutob Wangyal said, "They will attack us tomorrow."

Although different opinions were expressed, there was a gradual consensus that the Chinese could be trusted. The night wore on as our side felt skepticism mingled with trust. No one unsaddled their horses, but most horses were hobbled. When Brother and I were about to hobble our horses, Father said, "Don't hobble them tonight."

I imagined all sorts of tragedies and was so afraid that I couldn't sleep. I had never seen people kill each other. Wars, shootings, and killings were all just stories, but now they seemed about to happen to Father, Brother, and me. I stared at Father's immense mass of leonine hair and felt passionate sympathy. For his family, Father went with a caravan, hunted, and was a lay tantric specialist. I lived under his protection and did not suffer from starvation and cold and had successfully gone through the monk initiation ritual at the Sakya Sect headquarters. I would never have had the chance to be a real monk without him. Father would do anything for us, regardless of what it cost him. I envisioned Father leaving us permanently. Why did I have that thought? Why didn't I think Brother or Mother would leave me? I don't know.

Unable to sleep, my eyes shifted from Father's hair to a hill. Even at midnight, everything was visible against the brilliant background of the night's dark-blue sky. I saw some clandestine

activity on the hill and realized something was about to happen. Throbbing and melting with fright, I nudged Father. He motioned for me to remain quiet. He had already noticed it as had our companions, but they didn't take it seriously. We had no way to deal with what was about to happen. Any countermeasures would have only made the situation worse.

As my mind drifted to other things I was jerked back to this miserable reality by gunshots. Disorganization seethed around me amid shouts, mantra recitations, and names called. I was at an utter loss. I stared at countless red hot bullets streaking through the night air at enormous speed toward us.

Father said, his mouth nearly touching my ear, "Get your horse ready. Forget the baggage."

Father, Brother, and I tried to mount our horses that were terrified by the shooting. They bucked and jerked, trying to break free from their tethers. I was too short to mount from level ground. I needed a slope or a rock to stand on. I somehow transported myself through this thundering chaos to a crevice between our camp and the Chinese. I desperately pulled the horse over and he reluctantly came. Hundreds of hot red bullets flashed around me and a deafening clamor filled my ears. I could hear nothing except gunfire. I absolutely expected death to come immediately.

When I got to the crevice, I mounted my horse and rode toward Father as hot red bullets filled the air. Men and boys struggled to undo their horse fetters. Father's directions had been prescient.

I followed Father and Brother. Hot orange bullets flew under the belly of my horse. Suddenly he bucked and I fell off as he plunged heavily back to earth. I tried to get him back up and then felt his warm blood. I realized he had been shot and was dying. I yelled to Father, who told Brother to get me.

Brother galloped back and we then raced away on the same horse. Bullets filled every bit of space in the night air, as though tiny meteors were showering the earth. We desperately fled. I imagined thousands of holes in my robe as the shouting and sounds of battle diminished. Still, we raced the horses until they could no longer run.

The next morning, we found a few people had received minor injuries, but many animals had been killed. Kongkong had been arrested. One of our companions took his rifles and his horse.

I carefully checked my robe and found it had no bullet holes. Father and Brother were in perfect condition. My horse and one of our mules had been killed. We had no food and gear. We swore to take revenge on our attackers.

Tutob Wangyal was a leader of a village along the Yangtze. While untying his horse's fetters, a bullet had flown under the hooves and scraped his hand. He said, "I never expected my amulet not to work. I truly believed that no weapon could pierce my skin."

I carefully and suspiciously listened as he continued, "Once on the way to Lhasa, I encountered bandits on Gola Mountain Pass. They shouted that I should lay my rifle on the ground. I then held the rifle in my left hand while holding my pistol in my long sleeve. They did not know what I was going to do. I fired my pistol and two men fell. At the same time, one man shot at me, but the bullet did not pierce my skin. The remaining bandits were so shocked they fled. I then collected their guns and horses."

I wondered how it was possible that the bullet did not hurt him.

After Kongkong was arrested, we had five adults and three novices. Tutob Wangyal suggested we cross the river to look for the Drawu Chief's father-in-law for help in retrieving the looted goods. Father said, "Drowning in the river or be killed by soldiers - it's the same. I don't want to risk my family's life for the goods."

I usually enjoyed listening to stories about fighting, but not this time. I only wanted a cozy bed and hot milk tea. Even though people were talking about how aggressive they were, we went behind a rocky mountain for shelter and hid there until night, when we marched toward home. I was utterly exhausted and didn't want to speak. Hoping to see the light of a nomad tent, I peered into the vast dark land. I took short naps while riding my horse. At dawn, when we hid in a safe place, I asked Father, "Why don't you kill some animals for us to eat?"

Father said, "It might get the attention of the Chinese."

I was disappointed. We stayed there until night came, and marched again. I had eaten nothing for two days and was suffering from starvation and fatigue.

Tutob Wangyal was originally from a nomad tribe north of the Yangtze River. He married a farmer woman in Gakla. Tutob Wangyal's tribal men were brave and famous for fighting. People said that men of that tribe never withdrew from a battle. When he was in his twenties, his tribe had two battles with the Guomintang Army. They defeated the Guomintang Army the first time but the second time, Ma Bufang sent 1,000 specially chosen troops. In the end, Tutob Wangyal's tribe was defeated and many adult men were killed. The remaining people became fugitives in the Ngakchu Area for ten years. Ma Bufang sent a message to the fugitives to let bygones be bygones. They then returned to their homeland and, twenty years later, many boys had become men.

On June 4, 1958, around 2,000 men, led by Drapa Namgyal and other leaders ambushed a PLA convey of forty-two military trucks. At the beginning, they shot at the trucks. Later many young men could not control themselves. They raced to the trucks holding their swords while shouting their war cry, "*Ki he he!*" Hand to hand combat ensued. The Chinese soldiers' rifles lacked bayonets and the Tibetans were much better at hand to hand combat. After several hours, about 600 Chinese soldiers were killed at a cost of ten Tibetan men's lives. It was a massacre, a near-total victory. They looted weapons and food. But this victory was the beginning of their-own annihilation. A month later, a convoy of hundreds of trucks and cannons, came to Jatang where 2,000 Tibetan men were gathered on a hill top. The PLA fired cannons at the hill, killing many of the men. The remaining men raced down the hill toward the enemy, holding their rifles, resembling the horserace shooting performance. They were all exposed to heavy machine guns. Only a handful of men were able to break away and live.

Tutob Wangyal was a very brave man and became a rebel leader after 1958. They received American weapons that were dropped by planes near the Salween River. He fought many times and killed many enemies, but the number of their men became fewer and fewer, battle by battle. Tutob Wangyal realized it was impossible to

defeat the PLA. He did not hide during battles and was prepared to die at anytime. He shot while sitting cross-legged. He said that he didn't want his legs shot and then captured. He fought until his last bullet, then bared his upper body, put his machine gun on his shoulder, and walked toward the Salween River. This was the last image of Tutob Wangyal witnesses remembered. Nobody knew or heard anything about him after that. Maybe he jumped into the Salween River.

We moved along the north bank of the river and reached several giant boulders where the river came out of a big cave called Demon's Throat. We saw some yaks near Demon's Throat. We dismounted and looked for places to take cover in fear of Chinese ambush, but it was needless worry.

Father saw that I was starving and said, "I'll hunt a blue sheep for us."

Rinyang and Tutob Wangyal immediately rejected Father's suggestion and said, "The gunshot will expose our whereabouts."

The night and the riding seemed endless. I felt the passing of every second, something I'd never experienced before. In the past, I had thought that every day was happiness without suffering from starvation and fatigue.

We stopped on a mountain the next morning, rested for half a day, and moved on. My body was nearly limp and I could no longer stay on my horse without help. My vision was no longer sharp. Everything was unclear. We continued on until midnight. The land was sparsely populated and we met no nomads until the next day when we reached the Jezang Area.

Hallucinating from fatigue and lack of food, I felt bewildered when I saw a dozen tents in a huge valley. We asked for food and explained what had happened to us. We were received enthusiastically and welcomed with mutton, dried meat, *tsampa*, yogurt, and milk tea. Father told Brother and me to eat only a little or we would die because we had not had food in our stomachs for quite awhile. Even without this warning, it was impossible for me to eat much because my throat was so sore that I could hardly swallow yogurt.

Two days later I had recovered. The adults were discussing a counterattack. The local nomads were well acquainted with the Drawu Chief and were willing to help, but most of the men in their tribe had gone somewhere else to stop the Chinese advance.

Local people's conversation told us that the political situation had changed dramatically since we had left for Lhasa. After they had heard of events in Dondrubling, local men spontaneously organized militias and went to the mountains.

The delicious food and enthusiastic hospitality agreed with us and we were soon strong and healthy. We left with one man leading us to the mountain where their men were living. The men greeted each other when we arrived. Father knew many of them. They said, "Tibetans are talking to each other and demanding freedom for the people who have been arrested in Dondrubling."

We left Jezang, passed Rashul, and came to Patang where we visited a family for a meal. We became more cautious the closer we got to Dondrubling. We avoided crossing open places in fear the Chinese would discover and then shell us. Our experience on that night raid had made us very careful. We reached the hill pass at the end of a big valley and saw a few yaks running on a slope. Father and other four men held their rifles, raced up to the hill top while bending their heads down as if it was a military drill. They took a shooting posture at the pass as soon as they got there. Brother, a young monk, and I held our horses at the bottom and waited fearfully. Nothing happened. Still, we dared not pass the hill in fear of a shell from a distant hill. We assumed the Chinese were watching with binoculars and would shell us. When we were sure there was no danger, we mounted and passed the hill to an open place at the bottom of a wide valley. Father told me to follow him closely. We galloped to the other side of the valley, crossed a small river, and entered a small valley at the top of a mountain where we met a Galka Village troop of around twenty men. They were having *tsampa*. Tutob Wangyal was their leader.

They all stood up to show respect when they saw us. They had rifles and a few bullets. They wore woolen robes of natural wool color and wore traditional boots. The ankle section of these boots were made of red woolen fabric, nicely matching the red tassels in their

braided hair. They told us what had happened and their rescue plan for the detained leaders and lamas. They all were dressed the same and I liked their uniforms. I thought this was the local soldiers' uniform.

We walked on the top of North Mountain toward my village. Father, Brother, and I stopped at Grandfather's summer pasture for some days. My eyes gazed into the blue sky and at the ubiquitous green landscape, Dondrubling Monastery, and my village. Nothing seemed to have changed. But here, many men were preparing to liberate prisoners. They carefully did everything, posted sentries around the clock, and did not cook at night in fear of exposing their location.

I don't know what the Gakla men did. Anyway, they camped at the top of North Mountain of my village and purposefully grazed their horses on a barley field belonging to a household who had participated in the socialist cooperative and received a Chinese salary. They then attacked some Chinese soldiers in my village.

Once, a Chinese soldier and a Tibetan policeman were sneaking along a stone wall of the barley field in the village. Tutob Wangyal led his men and shot at them. The soldier died instantly and the policeman was hit and moaned in great pain. He begged to be killed to end his pain. Tutob Wangyal then shot him once to put him out of his misery.

A few days later, Father went to my village. He was only man in my village who still had a gun.

An eighteen year old boy talked about Father after he returned to the village:

When I was eighteen years old, we heard that Rinchen had returned from his Lhasa trip. They were looted at a place called Dzaradring. Rinchen left his two sons at his father- in-law's summer pasture. He was the only person who still had a gun. He came with Gakla troops. They killed a few Chinese and a Tibetan translator and collected their weapons. There was only a single squad of soldiers in Norbuling Village. They occupied the Drongme Family house as made it their base. The Drongme Family was childless and the old couple owned the biggest house made of rammed earth in my village. This house had small

windows outside and a big skylight inside. It was impossible to take this house without explosives. Rinchen and the Gakla village men stayed in a house near the Drongme Family and besieged the Chinese. They hoped that Chinese would come out for water and then they could easily capture them all. Actually, the Chinese dug a well inside the home walls.

People still circumambulated the *mani* stone pile. When they got near the Drongme Family's house, they ran with bent heads, in fear of shooting. One day, a woman from the upper village was shouting. All the young men went near a stupa where we could see the Drongme Family house. We began shouting "*Ki he he!*" The Chinese fired at us with their machine guns and threw a grenade, which exploded far from us. We were scared and ran toward our homes. Everyone worried that the Chinese would come and kill everyone. Blacksmith Karma (Tadrin's father) said, "We don't have a single gun. We should ask Rinchen to protect us tonight."

Rinchen was the best marksman in our village and had a type 38 rifle. We asked Rinchen to come to our part of the village. Rinchen left the Gakla troops in the lower part of the village and came over to our side. Two young men and I went to Rinchen's house and spent the night with him on the roof of his gate. Around midnight, a dog barked and we noticed someone was there. Rinchen held his gun and jumped off from the gate roof, and ran down a lane toward the riverside. We waited until he returned late that night. In the next day, a Chinese soldier had been killed on a hill between my village and Dondrubling. No one knew who did it.

### Return Home

We went home that night. Mother was delighted to see us but quickly resumed worrying. She described what had happened in our absence. The PLA had offered to trade one pistol for two rifles and many people traded their pistols for rifles. In this way the PLA made a list of villagers who owned firearms. They also obtained unregistered pistols that were a potential threat.

During a religious festival at Bumda Monastery the PLA encircled the monastery and captured many Tibetan men. On the same day, several men were captured in a meeting held in the Drongme



Family courtyard. The PLA next searched and confiscated weapons according to the names on their list. As the news spread, rural village men fled to the mountains or gathered in local monasteries to avoid a similar fate.

On May 18, 1958, events were touched off by an incident in Dzinda Village near the Yangtze River. This was the first violent incident against "The Democratic Reform" in the Gawa Area.

Getra originally came from Dege. He had lived in Dzinda Village for many years. The county Party Secretary, an Amdo Tibetan named Wangchen, had led a team of government workers to Dzinda Village to persuade them to form a socialist cooperative. Wangchen's tone of voice was decisive and mandatory. The only choice offered was to accept The Democratic Reform, which meant villagers had to hand over their property to the Chinese. The team also attempted to collect personal property accumulated over many generations and also to confiscate arms. Wangchen threatened that the government would send villagers to jail who refused to cooperate.

Deadly conflict erupted between the government work team and locals. Getra raised his sword at the work team. Wangchen was terrified and ran from the house, but met Gezang, a village man at the gate. Gezang struck Wangchen with his sword, but not hard enough to stop him. Getra's wife saw her husband chasing the Party Secretary and threw a stone at Wangchen, who then ran to a ladder at the village leader's home. By this time, Getra had caught up with him and killed him with his sword. Locals then killed two other men. Villagers thought that Getra was possessed by the local mountain deity. Getra raised his sword to the sky and shouted, "*Ki he he!*" which was followed by other village men.

Three team members leapt into the Yangtze River and escaped. When they reported this uprising, the PLA unexpectedly accused them of being absent without leave and sent them to jail. When the Chinese soldiers came to the village, Getra and village men were frightened and hid in nearby mountain. The Chinese then sent the Drawu Chief and wives of the village men to persuade Getra and other village men to surrender. The Chinese promised not to kill them. However, after they surrendered, nine men including Getra were sentenced to death and all the other village men were arrested. Getra

and the other eight men who had been arrested were executed in the center of Dondrubling. All the townspeople were required to watch. Some poor Tibetan zealots cut off their ears and noses, and flesh piece by piece. This process took two hours before the 'criminals' were shot in the head.

The Tibetan zealots were wanderers, beggars, and marmot hunters. Chinese looked for such people to work with and gave them rifles that they had confiscated from ordinary people. When Chinese gave them power and position, many of these poor people became a nightmare to others. Their personality was twisted. They were like dogs who would do any immoral thing to make their master happy. Some attacked their former benefactors during public struggle sessions. Actually they were cowards, hiding behind the Chinese when encountering brave men with weapons. Some took rifles from wanderers and beggars, who dared not fight back. The activists enjoyed torturing captives and women who no longer posed any danger. They had been at the bottom of society and eventually returned to their original social class at the bottom.

Dzinda was the first widow village in the Gawa Area. Only one man named Yudruk Lokar was able to return to the village in the 1980s. Other men did not survive imprisonment.

The Dzinda Village incident made clear what the Chinese would do to those who opposed their orders. Those who had once hesitated now lost all hope in the Chinese. However, punishing Dzinda Village as a warning to others had the opposite effect. Rather than quietly submitting, many villages spontaneously prepared weapons and horses, kept watch atop mountains, and attacked Chinese soldier units.

The Chinese were forced to withdraw to their strongholds. All village troops gathered on mountain tops near Dondrubling and attempted to rescue those who had been detained. A lack of explosives, however, meant that this was not successful.

A man killed two soldiers near the Drawu Chief's home. Chinese soldiers, their translator, and Tibetan revolutionaries were besieged in the Drongme Family's stone house, which had only one entrance and was originally designed for defense. The Chinese made

it their fortress. Without water, the besieged Chinese would soon surrender, or so most people predicted.

I peered at Drongme's house from the corner of the *mani* wall adjacent to the besieged house and saw nobody standing on the roof or watching from the windows. I tiptoed to another corner of the *mani* wall. Father had forbidden me to go near the house.

Father slept on the roof of our house with his rifle in fulfillment of his duty to watch the besieged house. Father was reluctant to oppose the government, but he did not want to be labeled a 'Chinese lover'.

A military convoy of forty trucks was attacked by local nomads in Dronchen, the gate to Dondrubling from Ziling. Forty trucks were destroyed, over 600 soldiers were killed, and weapons and food were taken.

Frightened men from nearby villages crowded into Dondrubling Monastery. Although fugitives and monks were poorly armed, the hilltop location was at a commanding height and had excellent advantages in defense and overview. Shelling the monastery had little effect, thanks to the protection provided by the monastery's thick dirt walls. Nevertheless, people abandoned Dondrubling Monastery and fled at night.

### My Fugitive Life

My family, plus the families of two uncles and one aunt, fled west like everyone else. Father hid his rifle in a long wooden bucket. Our wandering life continued on the sparsely populated, vast Plateau. Sometime we stopped and camped for half a month in safety.

We brought limited food from home, but Father hunted blue sheep when we needed food. Father was strict and short-tempered. His moral standard dictated no stealing and no lying. He was never tempted by abandoned livestock and did not allow my uncles to kill even a sheep that did not belong to us.

Father knew when and where a flock of blue sheep came for water and waited ahead of time. He often killed two blue sheep with one shot.

I no longer needed to learn reading after we left home, but we never stopped evening chanting.

My teacher was my aunt's husband, a solemn emotionless man. He neither forced me nor scolded me. My impression of him changed.

I played with my cousins, Dorje Trashi, who acted as a *lhawa* 'spirit medium'. He was very familiar with *lhawa* activities and I really enjoyed his performances. However, Father scolded him, worrying he could be possessed by an evil spirit while pretending to be possessed.

My uncle, Dorje Trashi's father, was sick. His condition deteriorated and we stayed camped longer than usual. After Uncle died, we abandoned his corpse without a funeral. His death made our journey easier.<sup>52</sup>

We met a group from Patang who invited us to join them. Father politely said, "We would only bring you trouble. We will take care of ourselves."

One man said, "Would you sell your rifle? We don't have enough arms."

Father said, "I need to hunt for food, otherwise we will have nothing to eat."

We camped in the upper valley, finished our evening prayers, and some of us went to bed. Suddenly, I was awakened by gunshots and explosions. I saw flames and shooting from a distance.

Father was right, we would have been under attack if we had joined the Patang group. We moved up to a glacier where I saw a dog stuck in a deep crevice.

My family continued wandering. I could not tell where we were or what time of year it was.

When we heard about a policy of leniency, surrender appeared to be the only solution to end our wandering that seemed destined to result in our deaths. We then surrendered to the PLA in the Janyanyi area.

When Father handed his gun to the PLA, a Tibetan from Dondrubling who worked for the government said, "You are very

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<sup>52</sup> See Dorje Trashi's account.

lucky to re-embrace the motherland." They offered us meat, *tsampa*, bread, and yogurt. I ate too much bread and had a stomachache that night.

### Our Fugitive Life Ends and Father is Arrested

We stayed at the military farm for almost a year until Father was arrested. This farm was located in Jalak Valley, five kilometers west of Dondrubling. Children were assigned to herd sheep. A huge number of animals were concentrated in a small area. Every day, many yaks died. To preserve the meat, the meat was dried under the hot sun until it was hard as a rock. There were several piles of dried meat and we could eat as much as we wanted. The valley had very few stones so it was hard to find stones to throw at yaks. Some herders threw chunks of dried meat at yaks instead of stones.

A few days later, the PLA returned Father's gun along with ten bullets and ordered him to kill marmots. They said that it was a competition to see who could kill the most marmots. Father was an excellent marksman and could kill two blue sheep with a single shot. I felt confident that Father would be the champion. Father killed ten marmots, handed in ten pelts, and then received ten more bullets.

Once during the summer picnic back in our home village, sixty men lined up to shoot at a target called *linga*, which was a small cross made of bamboo. Thirty men did not hit it. When it was Father's turn, some men said if he did not hit it, then no one could. Father's bullet hit the *linga*, breaking it into two pieces, followed by cheers from the crowd.

After breakfast, I followed Father to the hillside to look for marmots. When several military airplanes flew west, marmots came out their burrows. They stood up, and looked for the origin of the noise, while signaling to each other. Father shot at a big fat marmot when the noise from the airplanes was over our head, overwhelming all other sound. The gunshot was covered up by the noise of the planes, which were on their way to bomb rebels. Every day, Father shot a marmot when airplanes flew over.

Father skinned the marmot, handed one skin a day to the PLA as required, and kept the carcass for ourselves. Father boiled the meat and said, "You should learn to eat marmot. It can save your life."

Brother and I reluctantly ate marmot and began to enjoy it after a few days. My later experiences proved Father had correctly foreseen the future when eating marmot was an important reason I stayed alive.

One day, Father's longtime friend, Tse Dondrub, visited us. He wept while chatting. Father gave him a bag of dried yak meat before he left. Two of our yaks were fighting as we came to send off Tse Dondrub. Father said, "This will be our last time see each other. Look! These two yaks never fought before."

Almost a year later, Father was called to attend a meeting. Two soldiers took away his gun again and escorted him away. I followed him to a hill. He told me he would return soon. I watched him until he disappeared into the horizon.

Father did not come back that afternoon. I went to the hill top and waited until late evening, imagining his figure appearing out of the darkness until Brother called me back home. I never saw my father again. I was thirteen. Brother was seventeen, Mother was thirty-seven, and Father was forty-five.

More difficult times were waiting. Later I learned that Father was summoned by the PLA and sent to a labor camp in Patang. The charge was that he had worked for the Drawu Chief. When Mother begged a military officer to set Father free, the officer warned, "If you want to join him at the labor camp, I can arrange it."

Uncle and my teacher were arrested a few days later, taken away, and they also never returned.

After Father was arrested, Mother, Brother, and I were reassigned from the military farm to the Democratic Road Commune west of Dondrubling. It was in 1960 and there was little food in the commune. I was assigned to herd the commune yaks while adults were forced to cultivate farmland. I went to the kitchen for tea after finishing herding. Three teenage girls with proletarian backgrounds were cooks. They would periodically give me small amount of *tsampa*.

One day, I raced down the slope, jumped over a ditch to the commune center, and saw a dead man with braided red tassels, face up in the ditch. I was scared and dared not look again. I reported this

to the commune. The commune found one missing captive. Yonton Gyamtso and some other men had been taken captive by the PLA during a battle. These captives had then been sent to the commune as targets of public struggle. The man who I had seen lying in the ditch had been unable to tolerate the brutality of these struggles. He had escaped from the commune during the night. He had fallen into the ditch while trying to jump over it. He fell to the bottom and waited to die.

After my report, some proletariat activists went the ditch and dragged him to the commune. He was still alive. Activities kicked and stomped him, and pulled out his hair until he stopped breathing. I felt guilty for causing this young man more misery.

We met Mother's cousin, an emaciated monk suffering from malnutrition in our village. We called him 'Little Uncle'. He preferred fasting to death rather than working for the commune. He expected to be sent to prison for refusing orders. We exchanged our experiences and inquired about relatives. Little Uncle said, "There's not much time left in my life. Please take this lambskin robe for your two sons and use it as a quilt." The robes had many holes. He said, "These are bullet holes. They shot me. My body was only bruised, but my lama was killed." He died a few days later. My memory of Little Uncle has faded over time, but I have never forgotten that lambskin robe with many bullet holes.

Mother did not want to stay in Jalak Commune and applied to move back to our home. Her request was approved.

One time, we were assigned to plow an abandoned field near the Yangtze River. We passed by my village and I saw my home. It had been five years since I left my village. My home seemed smaller than what I remembered and was now occupied by a woman with two pieces of amber on her head. She was watching us from the window. She had no idea that we were the owners of the house. We guessed she was southerner by the way she had dressed her hair. When we eventually returned to my village some months later, the second floor was occupied by a proletarian marmot hunter family. We lived on the first floor.

All our property had been confiscated except for a cushion, a teapot, a pot, and three bowls. That was all we had. Mother carried the cushion on her back, Brother took the pot, and I carried the teapot. We headed back to our home village.

Two days later we arrived. Nothing was left. We had no food and no quilts. We three slept horizontally on the cushion without disrobing.

Mother took Brother and me to see Father, but we were told we could not see him. We heard that he had been sentenced to twenty years.

Mother had two sisters and two brothers. One sister married Rindzin from Donda Village, which is near the Yangtze River. She gave a birth to a son, Madzung, who was four years older than I. A few years later, Madzung's mother died. The Loyul Family then sent another daughter to be Madzung's stepmother. She treated him as her own son. He was also her nephew. She then gave birth to two daughters. They were both born at the wrong time. One was born in 1956 and the other was born in 1958.

After the Chinese arrested village men, Rindzin took Madzung and fled. Finally they reached Nepal. Aunt lived in the village with her mother-in-law, who cared for the two baby girls at home while Aunt was forced to cultivate farmland in Yungbatang. There was little food in the village. The grandmother was sick in bed with two baby girls. When the younger baby, Drolma, cried for milk, her grandmother let her nurse her dry, sagging breasts which calmed the little girl for a few moments. Grandmother nursed the babies until she died. When Aunt returned home, she found the little girls still nursing her mother-in-law's cold corpse. It had been three days since she left home.

In 1979, Madzung returned from Nepal. He was one of the first groups of Tibetans allowed to visit their families and relatives. He wore bell bottom trousers, a sleeveless shirt, and dark glasses resembling an aviator's. His long hair was cut short to his neck, like a Chinese woman. He had a watch that was different from what people had seen before. Rumors said his watch could transmit secret messages overseas. He was always followed by some government men. He had a small camera that flashed in the dark. He took a photo



of me (the author), sitting on Father's lap. I could not control my laughter and hid my face in my hands. He wasted at least three shots, trying to get a better image of me.

His two sisters also visited my home. Drolma was a beautiful young woman in her early twenties. She wore a red nylon shirt that her brother, Madzung, had brought from Nepal. She took me into her arms and kissed both my cheeks with her warm lips.

### Starving to Death

Brother and I joined the commune. I guided the plow yak through soft soil under a stifling spring sun, looking at the mirage at the edge of the field. I had a strong craving for food. During rests, Brother and I picked up plant roots from plowed fields. We called these roots "pigeon yams". People had never eaten pigeon yams previously, but now they ate them ravenously, without cooking or washing. I put pigeon yams into my mouth and then spat out the dirt. They were a bit sweet.

The commune team provided a half bowl of *tsampa* per person per day. It was far from what we needed. People were starving.

I struggled for food to survive. I was too weak to even hunt a rabbit or a marmot. Occasionally, I killed sparrows for food and shared them with Older Brother, who was weaker than me and could not get anything.

*Tsalkarpo* was an aromatic, edible herb. At first, this herb was prized, and many wondered why they had not eaten it before. It reduced hunger, but then the body would bloat, as if air had been pumped into it. After a period, the patient rapidly became as emaciated as a skeleton. Most died.

People were fragile and powerless and life was very unpredictable. Acquaintances could die anytime, anywhere. If people had had the right to make a fire in their own stove when they wanted, they would have cooked anything edible to be stronger and live longer. However, a private smoking chimney was imaginatively interpreted as having stolen something to cook, and the perpetrator was then a target of interrogation.

Locals had a better ability to survive than those from Nangchen and other areas. After being sent to the Dondrubling Area, a lack of familiarity with the local situation or instinctively being nonchalant meant living on a ration of one hundred grams of *tsampa* per person per day. This meant death by starvation. Many never woke up in their beds. I saw corpses carried out from the commune dormitory room in the mornings. Others died working in fields.

Brother was luckily assigned to the hunting team to transport wild ass and blue sheep meat and thus had access to meat to eat.

### A Second Fugitive Life

Mother and I worked every day, converting pasture to farmland. The number of commune members became fewer from death through starvation and imprisonment.

Mother, I, and some women fled from the commune one night and reached abandoned Peri Village along the Yangtze River. We searched for food from house to house, but found nothing.

The next day, we found yaks on a mountain top. A woman from our group and I drove one yak into a cave, kept it there until night, and then we took the yak to the abandoned village. I thought, "Being the only man in our group, I should kill the yak." It was culturally taboo for women to butcher an animal and it was also taboo to eat meat butchered by women. But Mother refused and said, "You shouldn't forget your monk identity."

She and the other women killed the yak, made blood sausage, and boiled tea. The atmosphere was like that of Tibetan New Year Eve. Such a familiar feeling had been far from me for a long time. We chanted mantras for the yak before we ate the meat.

We ate the entire yak in seven days. We were unsure about our safety in staying in one place for a long time, so we moved to other, nearby places. If male adults had been in our group, we wouldn't have wandered in the nearby Dondrubling area but gone instead to remote areas with wildlife.

We hid in caves and among rocks in the daytime. We started our activity like owls under the cover of night and butchered a yak. We only took the best part of the meat and hid the rest in a cave, and

then went to another abandoned village. We were afraid of being discovered by our fire in the mountains at night.

We went through the dark night air to a house, looking for a kitchen. Meanwhile, a loud whistling sound came out of the darkness. We immediately stopped. Panting, throbbing, hearing, imagining, contemplating, chanting, moment after moment, nothing emerged from the utter darkness of that abandoned village.

We cooked the meat we had brought and had a delicious meal. The whistle sounded again. It was hard to figure out from which direction the whistle originated. It seemed to come from every direction at the same time.

We left the village before dawn and returned when it was dark. We heard the whistle again and again and got used to it. I asked Mother, "What is this sound?"

She replied, "A ghost is whistling."

No one in our group feared ghosts. Ghosts and corpses were nothing compared to our major concern of evading the Chinese.

We never stayed in the same place more than a few days. We traveled through many valleys, caves, and abandoned villages. Eating meat every day made us tire of a meat diet. To change our diet, Mother and other women would go to a wheat field and return with wheat seedlings or they would collect wild herbs. As time passed, we became more ambitious. From hiding in caves to abandoned villages at night, our daily activity had changed.

I viewed my village from a peak. It was so near and yet so distant. I observed the villagers as they worked in commune teams. We had a freer, more comfortable life than our counterparts in the commune. And we were not wandering endlessly across the vast wild Plateau chased by soldiers. I thought we were in the best situation.

A watermill in a lower valley emitted the odor of *tsampa*. I secretly observed the watermill and saw a teenage girl operating it. When I went to the mill room, she was shocked by my sudden appearance. I begged her for some *tsampa* and she generously gave me a bowlful. I thanked her and started to leave. She called me back and silently gave me a handful of roasted barley grain. I was deeply moved by her merciful heart. During the time people were starving to death, a bowl of *tsampa* could be traded for a *zi*.

We were discovered when we stole a yak near my village and then reluctantly fled into the mountains. We were exhausted and hopeless without food for more than a day. Father's cousin was working in a commune farm. When I went to beg for food, she exclaimed, "Where is your mother? Please tell her to come back. The leaders said that if she and her companions voluntarily surrender, they won't be punished. After you escaped, your brother was dismissed from the hunting team. His health is in critical condition."

Considering Brother's situation, Mother surrendered. Her companions realized that this was the only real solution and did the same.

We were frightened and restless, though we were not criticized nor punished after rejoining the commune. Mother and I were stupefied when we met Brother. His body was like a bag of bones. He resembled a frightening creature from the angry ghost realm. I hardly recognized him. Mother embraced him emotionally and wept.

Brother recalled his experience after we escaped:

I joined the hunting team after a three-day walk from Dondrubling. My duty was to transport dead wild ass. Though it was tough work we had plenty of wild ass meat, but good times are always short. I was not able to continue because Mother had escaped. I then returned to Dondrubling, which had become like what I always imagine Hell to be. Little food had brought starvation and disease. People starved to death every day. My job changed from dealing with dead wild ass to dealing with human corpses. Every day I hauled corpses out of the village without any funeral ritual.

The relentlessness of this world brought me near death. No one cared about me. Father was imprisoned. Mother had vanished. I never expected that even corpses would be so dishonored. One day, I put a scrawny corpse on the stretcher. I and another person used to carry corpses outside the village. As we were carrying this corpse, one of its dangling hands struck me in the face. It seemed it had deliberately slapped me. I was so shocked that I fainted.

This little incident affected me profoundly spiritually and physically. I only have one hundred grams of *tsampa* per day to eat. I am slowly dying.

Our escape was recorded and unavoidably dealt with, as we had expected. I was too young to take responsibility for our escape, but Mother and the other women were called to the front of the crowd to receive punishment from devout revolutionaries. Mother was very sociable with people in our team. Two revolutionary women whispered to Mother in a friendly way, "Don't be afraid, Sister. We know how to not hurt you." When the revolutionaries beat Mother and the other women, they only pretended to beat Mother.

### Eating With Pigs

The commune where we lived was west of Dondrubling. I eventually realized that I was hoping for something that would never happen and that if something was going to happen, I had to make it happen. The road was always under my feet because I was always on the move, always walking.

I considered many food targets and finally settled on the PLA camp's pigsties. I found a big empty metal can in the military garbage. This tin was very practical. I used it to scoop pig food, cooked in it, boiled water in it, used it as a bowl, and used it as a weapon when I fought other boys.

Like other boys my age, I supported my mother with stolen food - I always shared my trophies with Brother and Mother.

I wasn't old enough to be sent to jail, but I was old enough to steal. I was the perfect age for the times.

Pig feed was mostly tofu dregs. On a lucky day, leftover PLA food that had been kept in vats in the army kitchen for some days was fed to the pigs. Bits of spoiled bread floated in white foam in this massive swine cocktail. Pig feed was not healthy and delicious, but it maintained my life. The overripe vaguely rotten stale smell of spoiled food, even today, reminds me of pigsties.

If several soldiers were tending the pigs, I could not get any food. I knew the exact time of the pig feedings. I hid behind the

pigsties. The pigsty floor was covered with pig feces and mixed with mud that smelled beyond horrible. When soldiers poured two big vats of stale food into the concrete trough in the pigsty, the pigs crazily devoured the food while putting their filthy feet into the trough. As soon as the men left, I leapt into the pigsty, kicked and beat the pigs with my tin, scooped up what solids I could, and devoured them at once in fear the soldiers would find me.

I not only had to deal with the pig feeders and the pigs, but I also had to compete with a dozen other boys as well.

Brother wanted to come with me so I brought him near the pigsties. I explained everything to him and we both successfully obtained pig feed. Brother and I then did this every day. But one day we were discovered by the feeders. We desperately ran away. Brother could not run quickly and the soldiers caught him. I told Mother.

She was very worried and pleaded with a PLA captain, who released Brother, who said, "I will never try it again."

### From Street Child to Thief

Mother and Brother were sent to cultivate mountain fields while I continued to stay in a village near Dondrubling. I did no assigned labor nor did I receive anything from the production team. My daily activity was roaming around military sites in Dondrubling and Norbuling. Mother believed that I would fend for myself and have a life better than what she and Brother were experiencing.

Every day I saw two people carrying emaciated corpses on their shoulders. The corpses' black hair sagged and swung as they were carried. The corpses were thrown in a valley near where I live. Seeing and smelling these corpses on a daily basis was unpleasant. I didn't want to stay in the village and I didn't want to stay in my family home. There was nothing to yearn for in that abandoned, empty house. I decided to leave. I had nothing to take with me except my tin.

I wandered through military horse shelters, pigsties, dining rooms, and garbage sites. Garbage sites near military stations tempted me because the army had better living conditions than other work units. Cigarette butts were the most welcome find from garbage sites. Many boys struggled for butts.

My monk identity kept me from smoking for some time, but I slowly got used to it because it gave me a warm feeling on cold days. When I saw filthy butts in garbage, I raced with my companions to snatch them. I never cared about map-like tracings on butts, which might have been caused by urination or rain. Cigarettes had no filters at that time. I could not hold a short butt so I used two sticks to hold it. It was good for less than four puffs. In time, my nails and fingers yellowed.

I slept on the streets in Dondrubling. I didn't feel particularly uncomfortable. I had slept outside without blankets for a long time. I moved to a yard where there was a big pile of straw and I slept inside the straw. I was not the only 'guest' there. Other boys did the same.

All my senses were filled with touching, smelling, and hearing straw. I ached from the sharp straw pricking my neck and feet, but it was warmer than outside.

In the morning, I brushed straw from my body, neck, and hair and started searching for food. I had not cut my hair nor washed it for a long time. My large wad of hair resembled a broom full of straw. When I saw my shadow on the ground, it was hard to know if my head was covered with hair or straw. I had no sense of being clean nor was I concerned about my appearance.

A disease spread among the military horses. Killing the sick horses seemed the only solution. Sometime, soldiers brought one or two horses from outside the camp and shot them in the head with pistols.

Dead horses were a great challenge with many people waiting for the fresh horsemeat and rushing onto the carcass and cutting away pieces of flesh like hungry vultures fighting over a human corpse. Everyone wanted the best parts. There was quarreling about who found it first and who owned it. Inevitably, fighting ensued. I challenged anyone who tried to monopolize the dead horse, except the five brothers of the Gaba Family. If they monopolized the dead horse, I got nothing. My tin was a very practical weapon. Clattering about in dust, we fought for horsemeat like dogs. Finally, realizing that endless struggle was useless, compromise ensued and the conflict ended.

The smell of fresh horse blood was strong. Sometimes I got a half tin of blood and sometimes just a piece of skin. I didn't care about

the cleanliness of food, but I felt like vomiting if I saw someone drink fresh horse blood.

Skinny was a very thin boy's nickname. He had a horse-joint bone that he kept for a long time in his tin. We knew when he was running because of the sound the bone made as it rattled inside the tin. He boiled water with the bone in the tin, creating a few dots of oil. Sometimes, he licked the bone and said, "I'll never throw this bone away."

I brought whatever I had scavenged and planned to eat to a stove outside the army dining room. I put my tin on hot red ash, and waited for the horse blood, meat, or pig feed - whatever it happened to be - to boil. Army cooks tried to make me leave, but I was very obstinate and refused. They kicked me from one side, but I moved to the other side, and continued cooking until they tired of me.

As time passed, I became more ambitious and my interest moved from pigsties to kitchens and horse feed. Sometime I furtively went to storerooms to steal anything edible, but mostly rice and flour.

To steal fresh, steamed buns from a kitchen was a great victory. When cooks removed the lids of steamed bread containers, steam filled the room, creating poor visibility. I seized this chance to steal bread.

Bad karma came one time when I stole a bag of hardtack, devoured it all, and then drank a lot of water. My bloated belly was so painful that I rolled on the ground in agony, holding myself and sweating profusely. Visiting a doctor was impossible. I had seen so many dead people, that I was not afraid of dying. My only wish was to be reunited with my family. Strong emotions filled my mind as tears filled my eyes. "Where is Father? What are Mother and Brother doing?" A strong feeling of homesickness reduced my physical pain, as though I had taken painkillers.

As night wore on, I desperately crawled to a pile of straw. The pain continued, but then gradually faded. I felt I had no strength. I needed rest, but I had to struggle for food to survive. No one cared about me when I needed help. I realized that the only way to survive was to continue struggling for food. Physical and spiritual suffering for a long time meant sickness. My body was getting weaker. I sweated profusely every night.



Before sleeping, I expected that I would not wake up. When I did wake up the next morning, I was disappointed to be alive. Seeking food was such distasteful work for me. I felt that I had little energy to do anything. I considered patiently waiting for death rather than scavenging for food. Rationally, I understood waiting for death was stupid and as long as I had a day's life, I had to struggle for that day. I didn't dream about a distant future while my attention was focused on how to get my next meal. The experience of hesitating between staying alive and dying impacted me deeply and finally made me more ambitious.

I went to kitchens and storerooms during the daytime and stole a bag of flour, a bag of rice, and a bag of wild yams. I ate this until it was gone and gradually recovered from my illness.

I continued stealing from the army station and became too ambitious and careless. I was caught by some young soldiers who tortured me. They stuck needles in my buttocks and hands and laughed when I screamed. They enjoyed torturing me. A captain saw this, scolded them, and released me. While my tears were still wet, I again targeted the army station.

I was caught and tortured several times. One time I was sent me to the police station where I was lectured about the law and why I should be a good boy. They neither interrogated nor tortured me that time, and provided a delicious supper during the day I was in detention.

Such instructions and punishment didn't affect me. I continued stealing from the army station. Corn and beans were much better than pig feed. An appropriate time to steal horse feed was at night. Soldiers knew horse feed would be stolen so they guarded the horses until the horses had finished eating. Some boys and I hid near the horse shelter, waiting for the guards to leave. The guards were irresponsible. They periodically turned on lights to give the illusion they were keeping watch. Sometimes a little noise would attract a soldier's attention and he would carelessly shine a light from the horse shelter into the night, but do nothing else.

One unfortunate night, soldiers discovered and chased us. We raced away and they stopped. At other times, other soldiers desperately chased us with lights, exposing us so that we could not

hide. We then jumped into the icy river. The soldiers didn't want to get wet so they stopped chasing us. We preferred to suffer from the cold water than be beaten. We jumped into the river many times to escape. It became our strategy. Eventually, when we ran toward the river, the soldiers realized that they would be unsuccessful and turned back.

The river was not deep, but it was deep enough to saturate the lower part of my robe. I wrung water out of the robe and slept inside a straw pile. Shivering with cold, I felt disoriented, moved deep inside the straw, and rolled up my body into itself as much as I could. Gradually, my body warmed. In the morning, I brushed straw from my body. Steaming with stink, I felt lazy and slept again.

There were good soldiers and bad soldiers. I quickly figured out who were good and who were bad. I often went near the good soldiers during mealtimes, hoping they would give me leftovers. Soldiers had a difficult time giving food to us in public. They were afraid their captain would notice and scold them for 'wasting' food. Instead, a good soldier might pretend to go to the river to wash a bowl, or go to the toilet. I immediately understood and would follow him. He would pour his leftover food into my tin as soon as the others couldn't see him.

Sometimes when I saw a good soldier walking on the bank, I followed, hoping he would secretly give me fresh bread. Hoping for some contribution, I dogged him wherever he went until I got something.

Kunga was not old enough to rob army stations. Instead, he followed Chinese women carrying a child on their backs. He would gesture in a funny way to the child, who enjoyed his performance, and then take bread from the child's hands while the mother was ignoring him. He always got something this way.

Once, three boys and I were discovered while we were in a storeroom. The soldiers kicked us to a small room and beat us. One soldier said in Tibetan with a heavy Chinese accent, "I'll kill you!" took a knife, and lightly cut the skin on our necks and arms until they bled. We screamed and his officers ordered him to release us.

With the passing of winter, the pile of straw that was horse feed grew smaller and smaller. Pigs and dogs instinctively understood

a manure pile was an appropriate place to sleep. I also slept there. The manure produced heat underneath, as if I were sleeping on a *kang*.<sup>53</sup>

Sometimes, Mother and Bother came to Dondrubling and worked in the fields. My life was better than theirs. I felt I was responsible for Mother and Brother, always shared what I had stolen, and spent more time getting food.

One of several army stations around Dondrubling was in Norbuling. I realized targeting various sites was a good strategy so that soldiers would be less alert and I could more easily get what I wanted. Once the soldiers were familiar with me, I could not get near their gate.

I became a skillful thief. I would make a noise to get a guard's attention and then be still for a long time until he felt confident. I could almost feel the guard's actions. Everything seemed under my control. To enter a room through a locked door was impossible, but through windows was always a possibility. Holes in rooms attracted me. If it was big enough to put my head through, I could always get my body inside, like a mouse. Sometime I took off my robe in order to wriggle through a hole.

When we entered a room, we usually saw various secular and religious objects. I was not interested in any of them. In other rooms, we found many rifles and uniforms. At times, we dressed up in uniforms, put guns on our shoulders, and acted as soldiers. We completely lost ourselves in such games and neglected the time passing. Finally, we reluctantly changed our clothing and left.

Skinny and I went to the Norbuling Army Station, where soldiers had occupied the Drawu Chief's house. One unfortunate day, Skinny and I were caught. The soldiers said, "You incurable boys need a lesson you won't forget," and began beating our heads with bamboo sticks. We tried to protect ourselves with our arms. In a typical commanding tone as if they were training military dogs, the soldiers ordered us to put our arms down. When we didn't obey they tightly bound our arms to our bodies and hung us from a beam. We begged them to stop torturing us, but they refused and continued beating our heads. No longer able to use my hands to protect my head,

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<sup>53</sup> *Kang* = heated bed platform.

I felt my head burning. I could no longer tolerate it. I was full of anger and hatred, which made me a little stronger for a short while. Then all my senses became vaguer until I became unconscious.

Some children were watching and ran to Dondrubling and told Mother that I had died. Mother began wailing and immediately rushed to the Norbuling Army Station. When she arrived, I had regained consciousness and was enjoying the sunshine. She was amazed that I was alive, looked at me carefully, and took off my army cap. Blood colored the cap like a map. Mother said, "Don't steal anything from the army station."

### Marmot Hunting, Tractor Mechanic, and Becoming a Father

In 1962, my homeless life almost ended when Mother and Brother returned to Dondrubling. We stayed in Democratic Road Commune for almost one year before returning to The East Wind Commune in my village. Mother decided to move to Norbuling and asked that our family be assigned to the community team in Norbuling. This was approved and we moved to Norbuling, where a commune leader had occupied our house. His family and mine then shared the same house. My family lived on the first floor. Our neighbors came, greeted us, and said they would like to help us move our property. We had nothing except a cushion, a teapot, a pot, and a yak hair blanket. Villagers commented that I was a famous thief and good at fighting and jokingly said, "You are a great thief, can you train my son?" "You are really fantastic. You are a really tough boy."

Mother and Brother continued working for the commune. I wanted to target the army station, but I was scared after that unforgettable experience of being hung up and beaten. I then moved to Father's friend's home in Dondrubling and continued my daily raids on the army station.

I went barefoot for a year after my boots were completely worn out. My feet became very tough. The only difficulty was walking in the morning when I felt pebbles poking my feet. I walked like a cripple every morning along the riverbank to the army station. My long narrow shadow on the road vividly depicted me from head to

toe, my way of walking, and my bristly, unkempt hair. This image is permanently in my mind.

My feet rapidly adapted to the road after I enjoyed sunshine for a while. In the afternoon, I could run desperately without my feet being sensitive.

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I have had numerous opportunities in my life - chances to make money, chances to receive great empowerments, and so on. Thousands of trivial chances have accumulated in my life and have formed my life. I seized many chances and I also lost many.

I ignored one seemingly trivial chance that would have fundamentally changed my life: I was staying in a room in Dondrubling. The house owner's son was about my age and was recruited as a student. He said, "Our teacher wants to recruit more students. Would you like to join our class?"

This sentence frightened me because I didn't have a good impression of schooling in my childhood and I had heard negative comments about Communist schools so I refused.

The next day, he came to my room with his classmate, Kunzangkyab, who later became prefecture governor. I knew they were going to recruit me so I hid in a corner of the room until they left.

Education is important and I lost a possibility to have more success. If I had attended school, I would have had a completely different life. I was not the only unlucky child who made stupid decisions. Many children avoided school. Any student who finished primary school was guaranteed a government job. However, locals put government employees into a negative category.

The government desperately needed local employees in various work units. After five years of primary school, those who understood a little Chinese language were deemed qualified to be government employees. The number of government employee was considered inadequate, despite a door wide open to Tibetans. My village was large, but nobody was willing to be a government employee. Government employees wore Chinese suits, spoke Chinese, followed the PLA, and ate Chinese food. This was the

typical image of government employees in most locals' minds. When I heard 'Chinese lover' and 'Chinese food eater' I immediately thought of government jobs.

I visited my home weekly with my trophies. Fires in private homes were forbidden. The socialist pot was the only approved source of hot food. If someone had a fire in their stove, smoke from the chimney attracted attention, the guilty party was accused of stealing food, and their home was thoroughly searched. Mother carefully made a fire in our stove very late at night to avoid detection, and cooked whatever I had brought.

As more and more boys focused on stealing from the army station, soldiers watched intently. Stealing became more difficult so I began hunting marmots and rabbits near my village. I was very good at throwing stones and could kill rabbits with stones. I looked in sagebrush, hoping for a sleeping rabbit. As time passed, I understood more about rabbits and rabbit meat. A fatal weakness of rabbits was their habit to sleep in the same places every day. I would remember these sites and attack the next day. When I saw a rabbit sleeping under sagebrush, I could easily kill it.

A Tibetan saying about marmots goes, "Real men won't kill me [marmots] and weak men can't kill me." Attitudes about hunting marmots was related to social status in the past. Marmot hunters were called 'marmot men', and were homeless tramps. Ordinary people kept a distance from them and intermarriage was out of the question.

Such denigration seemed to have completely vanished during these difficult times - a big fat marmot was appetizing to everyone. People were unlucky because they were tightly scheduled in their daily activities in the commune teams and were so weak that they could barely move.

I was one of the few who had time and the ability to hunt. The commune leader who lived on the second floor of my house had been a marmot man. Simultaneously, he had the aura of being a proletariat and was thus privileged to occupy our house. He could easily order people in the villagers to do this and that. We were very lucky to share the same house with him because it brought conveniences for my family, such as easily being approved for sick leave and general leave.

He continued hunting marmots, despite being a top man in the village. He was proud of being a marmot man. He thought hunting marmot was honorable. At public meetings, he condemned old society and criticized the expropriating class. His *drekar*<sup>54</sup> was particularly exaggerated. He sang, "Father is dying in the landlord's horse shelter, Mother is dying in the landlord's sheep shelter."

He had an excellent hunting dog that I really wanted to take with me when I went hunting, but I knew the leader would not lend it to me in fear I would teach it bad habits. However, his refusal didn't matter. When I whistled sharply, the dog came immediately. He could not stop his dog.

Hunting with that dog meant I killed more marmots, rabbits, and wild fowl. When neighbor boys saw me going to the hills with the dog, they followed. They wanted food from me so I could easily direct them. Those obedient boys painstakingly collected fuel and edible herbs. I put the herbs inside the wild fowl and baked them, which gave of a richly appetizing aroma, which led the boys to touch the baking birds before they were cooked.

We had wonderful picnics, but we were never satisfied with the small amount of food. I suggested that we hunt wild ass, deer, and antelope, which excited my followers. They wanted to try immediately. I said, "We'll start with wild fowls, rabbits, and marmots and then move on to antelopes and wild yaks."

We also followed an old Chinese man, helped him collect worms for bait, and asked him for cigarettes. I learned how to fish from helping Chinese fishermen. We enjoyed fishing. I was the fisherman and the boys collected worms for bait. We baked the fish I caught on hot flat stones. If our appetite was not satisfied, I led them to the army station to steal horse feed.

The boys timidly and cautiously entered the army station. Seeing them so nervous and timid, I thought it was an opportunity to demonstrate being a sophisticated, veteran thief. Magisterially, I became the head of this dawdling group.

Mother did not appreciate my hunting and alluded to my monk identity. Her objection was almost silent. She was not really sure if it

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<sup>54</sup> Genre of popular entertainment consisting mainly of talking.

was right or wrong and never encouraged me to hunt during the starving times. To some extent, she thought that I had embarked on a road of degeneration - a sharp departure from being a pure, innocent little monk. I felt guilty when I first puffed a cigarette and the first time I killed a little rabbit and a marmot. As time passed, however, this guilt faded as my life became entirely involved with stealing and hunting, as if my root guru was instructing me.

I felt uncomfortable recalling the Sakya Sect empowerment I had received from my root guru who had given me vows at Ngoru Monastery. I determined to remedy all my sinful acts, which were an obstacle to comfort, but I had no specific plan on how to rectify the situation.

I mercilessly killed many marmots in various ways. Marmots are great tunnelers. A marmot's family has several burrows within their territory. These are shelters in case of sudden danger for they lived in only one den. Their shelters are not deep. Some shelter burrows are connected underground. This is both their brilliant design and fatal weakness.

I lost many marmots through connected burrows and I caught many marmots because of connected burrows. I would block one hole and make a smoke fire in the hole the marmot entered. Sometimes I blocked a burrow and then smoked the burrow I saw the marmot enter. The dense smoke almost suffocated the marmot because the tunnels were connected. The marmot would then rush out and I would give it a deadly blow to the head.

I found a small bag of *tsampa* in a marmot's burrow, which I assumed someone had hidden there. My aunt saw it and asked me to give it to her. "Why should I give it to her?" I thought. I refused and she was upset. Aunt's husband was my Tibetan language teacher. She lived in the military farm until the end of her life in the late 1990s.

One day in the 1960s, I heard she was sick and visited her. She talked about how difficult life was in the old society. She said while weeping, "Your father, Rinchen, hunted blue sheep. Your younger uncle ate an entire blue sheep's stomach, even the fat."

I knew Aunt was an activist and had been promoted to the position of team leader. I then said, "Your brothers were lucky to have



fat to eat. What do we have now? I am dreaming of eating fat. How did your brothers die? Who made them die?"

Aunt was speechless.

In 1962, I joined the commune labor force to herd forty male plow yaks. I received seven workpoints per day in contrast to an adult laborer who received ten. Commune payment was based on accumulated workpoints. A year later, I became a regular laborer and worked and received ten workpoints for a day. My work were plowing, herding, collecting manure, and harvesting.

In the mid-1960s, our commune was assigned to dig a long ditch for the hydropower plant in Dondrubling. All communes in Dondrubling dug the ditch for a year. Finally, our hard work brought electricity to the town. Two or three year later, my village finally had electricity.

Our production team brought an electric motor for the threshing machine. No one in the team understood electricity. We were nervous about connecting wires because we had heard rumors about electrical shock. I was curious and learned the basics of electricity. I then became an electrician of our commune. There was not much work related to electricity. I was only busy during threshing time. I connected wires and brought light bulbs when light was needed for night work.

Sometime I helped Tadrin, who made sickles and horseshoes for the commune. Tadrin was in his late thirties and had a political hat, meaning he might face public struggle at anytime and any new accusations could land him in prison.

I occasionally helped him make sickles and horseshoes. Gradually, I learned to make sickles and horseshoes by myself. Hammering the red hot metal made my right arm ache for days but after some days of practice, I slowly got used to it.

Our commune ran two watermills in a stream adjacent to the village. This barely met people's needs since the stream was frozen in winter and the water ran low in spring. Most households owned a hand mill to grind *tsampa*, which required a lot of time. I suggested to Tadrin that we power a mill using an electric motor. He agreed and we worked from a sketch. We took a spare mill stone from a watermill to the shed in the center of the threshing ground where the commune

stored electric motors. We put a metal axis vertically into the mill stone pivot and connected a cylinder made of wood that then, with a strip of rubber, would connect to the electric motor.

Commune members curiously gathered around us. A man jokingly said, "You are Carpenter Kunga and Blacksmith Kunga." This was a reference to a well-known folktale *Carpenter Kunga and Painter Kunga*. They plotted against each other with Carpenter Kunga managing in the end to burn Painter Kunga to death. The joke at the threshing ground merely suggested that we were doing something that they didn't fully understand.

A few days later, we finished our work and I excitedly switched on the motor. The millstone spun too fast. It seemed as though the stone might break loose. Those around us withdrew a few steps as Tadrin shouted, "Switch it off!"

I suggested to Tadrin that we make a cylinder three times thicker in order to reduce the speed of the mill's rotation.

Tadrin was very cautious and said, "No, no. We should give up before there is an accident." He was afraid of making mistakes.

I reluctantly agreed.

The Culture Revolution began. Several big Chinese characters were painted outside my house and several houses along the road. More and more meetings were held in the commune. I didn't attend most meetings because I was herding male yaks and plowing fields with young men from our commune. We lived in a tent for days until we finished plowing. Mother prepared a small bag of *tsampa* which was not enough. We shared our *tsampa*, but Tsegyal did not want to share his *tsampa*. Tsegyal was ten years older than I. A thick beard covered his cheeks and chin. His nickname was Monkey. Our *tsampa* was only enough for two or three days. When it ran out, we hunted marmots. A marmot carcass has nine pieces if you counting its head as one piece. One time, I ate everything except for the head. Marmots were plentiful and provided an alternative food source. No wonder, wanderers hunted marmots in the time of the old society.

Our commune had a dozen horses. In a few years, the number of horses doubled and the commune decided to sell twenty to herders in Chumarleb. Five of us was assigned to sell horses and buy yaks. We started off one summer, driving the horses to Chumarleb and

reached our destination five days later. The county had no vehicle roads. Everything was transported by animals. We went household by household, exchanging one horse for five yaks. Within a few days, we had one hundred yaks. Herders in Chumarleb were rich. Every tent household was surrounded by several hundred sheep and many yaks. People were hospitable and they killed sheep for us. Wherever we went, they offered fresh mutton, which was better than marmot meat. We then spent six days to return to our village. The commune slaughtered a few yaks and divided the meat equally among commune members. The remaining yaks were kept on a commune farm managed by the Tsegial Family in the upper valley of the village.

Mother had a boyfriend who moved to our home and lived with us. He became my stepfather. I called him by his name. Stepfather had two sisters. One was a blind nun. Stepfather supported my idea to have my own blacksmith workshop. He and I then bought a hammer, an anvil, a chisel, bellows, charcoal, and metal. In our spare time, we made horseshoes to sell to make extra income for daily commodities.

Brother married and established his own home. I also had a girlfriend and became a father within a year. Mother got sick with some unknown disease. I told her that I would bring my newborn son to her. She rejected this, saying her grandson might get sick if she got close to him. She took Tibetan medicine, which didn't help. She died two months later at the age of fifty-one. During the time of her sky burial, we found that her back bone was black. Five years later, Stepfather died too. Ten years later, my doctor friend guessed Mother might have died from tuberculosis.

In the late 1970s, I became a tractor driver and then a tractor mechanic. I also did some trading in my spare time. Of course, I was a farmer too. I have lived in my village until today.

# TSEWANG CHODRON

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Tsewang Chodron (b. 1945) of Shargu Village is Lhakpa Wangmo, Tsering Sonam, and Rinchen's cousin. She was a fugitive, witnessed a battle at a monastery, and was escorted to Chamdo where she was accused of being the daughter of a local prominent figure. She narrated events from 1959 to 1961.

## The Airstrike

Airplanes rumbled across the sky as many white mushroom-like parachutes wafted to the ground. A cheerful cheer from the crowds, the monastery, and valleys greeted these new arrivals from the sky. Several daredevils and a lot of modern weapons landed on the ground. The daredevils were originally from Dege and Gawa, had trained in India and America, and had been flown in from India. In case of capture, they were ready to bite poison pills in their collars. The airdrops continued weekly. The Chuzhigangdruk filled a temple with the weapons. The Jara Chief, the local leader, informed the refugees around this area to participate in the weapons distribution. Hearing of the airdrops and desiring modern weapons, a crowd gathered as the monastery quickly became an arsenal and rebel center. Uncle Loyak and Tradé<sup>55</sup> led Drawu soldiers and participated in the weapons distribution.

It had been hard to find bullets. After the new weapons, women were not interested in old rifles, let alone the men. This grand contribution of weapons was noticed by the Chinese, who moved troops from Chamdo to this area. As I looked over the peaks, I saw smoke hanging over a huge camp. We had been surrounded by three rings of PLA. Tibetan men occupied the heights, and were ready for a

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<sup>55</sup> Tradé killed the police chief of Gawa County.

fight. I felt hopelessly sad when I sniffed the strong smell of tobacco from this PLA camp.

As Tibetans prepared to fight, several airplanes flew over our heads and dropped deadly bombs. The crowds desperately fled amid wailing. People ran to the temple, fled to the valley, raced up slopes, and some jumped into the river. The planes flew back and forth, bombing the monastery, enveloping it in dust and smoke. The planes persistently bombed, shot, and finally dropped large empty cartridge cases. Hoping to survive, some people put their heads into marmot burrows and some put their heads in wood buckets. Calamitous wailing, bleeding, and dying surrounded me but the bombs shocked me the most. I didn't know where to go. We left all our property, despite my feelings of painful loss. My sisters and I fled with a group from Dege and Danma through shrubs and streams until we reached a big river. We found dry wood, held on to it, and crossed the extremely cold river.

Some men from the Jangtsang Family were separated from their children and women. With fewer family concerns, they defeated PLA units several times and were known throughout both PLA and Tibetan circles. Many joined these rebels. The more times they won, the more followers they had. The more followers they had, the more danger they were in.

After his brothers were killed, Uncle Trashi Norbu, the monk, felt cynical about the future. In his mind, property only caused problems. He ordered his relatives to abandon everything except the long purse around his waist and said, "This is my older brother's. I promised him I would keep it. I will keep it until I die. If I meet him, I will order him to throw it away."

As did many monks at that time, he wore a secular robe and fought.

Once, some of my uncles and a hundred Drawu people encountered several hundred PLA soldiers at Dzagang Monastery. Our uncles told us to hide in a nearby valley. The seventh Gynak Incarnation Lama was with us. I peered at the monastery over a bolder. Uncle Trashi Norbu waved a white scarf, signaling surrender. PLA soldiers approached. Suddenly, Drawu's men fired and many soldiers fell to the ground. A sharp horn encouraged the PLA and they

advanced wave upon wave, despite the ground being increasingly littered with PLA corpses. Uncles and his companions repulsed PLA assaults on the monastery for three days.

Finally, airplanes assisted the ground troops as the PLA waged a vigorous offensive. The Tibetans could no longer resist and fled with the PLA in hot pursuit. In time, the shooting faded, though it was still audible. We walked over an area strewn with corpses, entered the monastery, and found Trashi Norbu lying on the ground, his purse perfectly snug around his waist. We wanted to take the purse, but dared not look at him, let alone take the purse. Being women, how could we possibly touch Uncle's corpse and unfasten the purse, despite knowing it contained fifty gold coins? We wailed and left.

I got separated from my relatives so I joined a group from Dege and Danma. Our livestock and property became steadily less until finally we had nothing. Our lives depended on meat for food.

### Mistaken for the Daughter of a Prominent Figure

Camouflage and grassland were the same color. Sudden pop-popping in the thin air energized our group as I hopelessly realized we were under attack. My legs wilted. The grass lost its green color as men in grayish-yellow PLA uniforms gained the advantage. We were arrested and detained with another group. I met the seven-year-old Gyanak Incarnation lama, Kunga Gyaltsan. He didn't know where his group and his two brothers were. Both the PLA and my companions didn't know who he was. His ruddy cheeks and dark red silk lambskin robe perfectly disguised his identity. I helped him in whatever way I could.

We traveled under soldier escort. Valley after valley, river after river - it seemed we would never reach our destination. Kunga Gyaltsan Lama's boots were completely worn out. I found a pair of discarded military shoes that were too big for him, but they were better than nothing. He shuffled sluggishly on the road. As a soldier's muzzle poked into his back, the soldier barked, "Quickly!"

The little boy would speed up for a few steps, then slow down and the muzzle would poke him again. We were fatigued, hoping for a rest, but reluctantly continued. Finally, we reached Chamdo.

Locals sympathized with our plight and when we passed state farms, women gave us cooked yak-calf meat. I selected the best part and gave it to Kunga Gyaltsan, who happily ate it. We reached a huge camp with thousands of refugees from Gawa. I knew some of them. The government not only registered fugitives and divided them into Tsongon, Sichuan, and Tibet groups, but also classified them into proletarian and exploiting classes.

A translator asked me, "Where do you come from?"

"Chamdo," I answered.

Gyanak Incarnation Lama elbowed me and said, "You should say, you are from Tsongon so that you can soon meet your mother."

They looked me up and down and said, "Who is your father?"

"Chimé," I answered honestly. They thought I was a landlord's daughter because I had five pieces of amber in my hair and was wearing a lambskin silk robe and a red, *bure* shirt.

One of my inquisitors said, "You must be Khandro Chimé Gonpo's daughter. Your father is injured. We captured him yesterday."

I said, "No, I'm not his daughter. I don't know him."

They didn't believe me.

Two women wearing Chinese suits came and carefully searched me, taking my necklaces, five pieces of amber, a string of prayer beads, and forty gold coins. One woman said, "The government will confiscate your forty gold coins. The other things will be returned to you before you leave." They put those things into a bag, sealed it, and recorded my name and the contents.

In their mind, these belongings proved I was Chimé Gonpo's daughter. They interrogated me and repeatedly insisted I was who I wasn't.

"I'm not," I said.

"You are...." they replied.

"I'm not..."

"You are..."

I guessed they would not arrest me. Irritated, I said, "Yes, you are absolutely right. I am his daughter," giving the answer they wanted to hear but, by this time, they didn't believe me. I really didn't know what to say and finally said, "Whatever you think is correct."

After a while, they took me to meet a young man, whose hands and feet were shackled, and asked, "Is she your sister."

He said, "No, my sister is only fourteen years old and she is in this camp."

They next brought an old woman and asked, "Is she your daughter."

She answered the same way. Although there was no evidence that I was Chimé Gonpo's daughter, I was classified as a rich girl and sent to a camp. I was sorry about the string of prayer beads. Karma Jamyang Rinpoche, a famous lama in Gawa, gave the beads to Father, who had given it to me.

Palmo, a girl from Gawa, consoled, "They confiscated my property too, but I don't care." She became my friend and we stayed together. We were given *tsampa* and did not suffer from starvation during our time in the camp.

After a month, a dozen rumbling trucks queued, spitting out blue smoke. We were to leave Chamdo for Jomda. A thousand people queued up for the trucks. I was worried about my property and said to Palmo, "Do you remember what that woman said a month ago? She promised our property would be returned before we leave. Now it's time to take it back."

She said, "We have no time. Look! The first truck has already left. Also, property is now worthless."

I said, "At least we can dedicate merit for our dead relatives."

I hopelessly queued for the truck. When we got in the last truck, the driver revved the engine several times. I anxiously kept looking around the camp, hoping the woman in charge of the confiscated property would appear. Luckily, I did catch sight of her and shouted "Hey! Lady."

She came over, I talked to her, she told the driver to wait, trotted to a room, and brought back our bags. She said, "Your bag had been opened. Your friend's bag is still sealed."

I grabbed the bag and felt it. The string of prayer beads was in it. I didn't ask any questions.

The truck began moving. I thanked the lady and then opened my bag. My necklaces and four pieces of amber were gone. I was glad to have the prayer beads. Later, I heard that if I would have told them



what were missing, I would have been compensated by the government.

We reached Jomda and stayed some months before we moved to Janjok, where we stayed several months. Finally, I reached my home in Shargu Village.

The worst part of the starving times had passed when we returned, but my family could not avoid more calamities. Grandfather and Father were jailed and never returned. A brother, who was an incarnation lama, was killed in a battle. Mother, my two sisters, and my younger brother were at home. Another younger brother was herding horses for soldiers and returned home a year later. My family did not leave the village until the 1980s.

# TSERING SONAM

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Tsering Sonam (b. 1947) of Lungda Village is Rinchen's sister and Lhakpa Wangmo's cousin. She was present when Dorje Trashi and Rinchen slaughtered a goat.<sup>56</sup> She helped Dukarkyab and his uncle and sister (Karlha) when they were in desperate need during the Cultural Revolution. She also described how her second husband was tortured and risked his life to protect a sacred *mani* stone.

## Dukarkyab

**M**y husband, his uncle, my two-year-old son, and I were herding in Patang in 1970. The commune owned all the livestock and made all decisions related to herding. We often had to report on work and progress. In late autumn, we prepared to move to the winter pasture. We packed many bags and waited for others to move first.

My husband's brother purchased grain from the township and came to my home. As night wore on, the dog began fiercely barking. My husband and I peered into the night. "Clip-clop" sounded in the darkness as three figures and a horse approached, silhouetted against the skyline. As they came near our tent, I heard a man say, "Help us!" in heavily Amdo-accented Kham dialect. We realized they were Dukarkyab, his sister Karlha, and their uncle.

Amdo people refer to older males as 'uncle'. Some years earlier, they had fled from Amdo to Gawa and joined the commune. Dukarkyab and Uncle were Traditional Tibetan Medicine doctors and deeply versed in various aspects of Tibetan culture. Uncle was a prominent lama somewhere in Amdo.

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<sup>56</sup> See Dojetrashi's narrative.

Dukarkyab said, "Uncle disguised himself as an old crippled man at the commune horse farm. This morning, some Red Guards gave us a cart to bring him to the public criticism meeting for being a cow demon and snake spirit."<sup>57</sup> Sister and I changed our mind, so we pushed the cart into the river, grabbed a horse for Uncle to ride, and hid in a valley until night."

My family was distraught. I felt as if milk was boiling out of the pot on the hot stove. We asked each other, "What should we do?" over and over.

Finally, my husband said, "We will dig a hole."

"Where?" I asked.

He said, "In the livestock yard."

I said, "But we'll move tomorrow. Maybe digging a hole in the winter farm site is better."

He agreed.

We chased the horse away into the night, put Uncle on a yak, and went to the winter farm site. The road was visible under dim moonlight. We silently dug a small hole in the livestock yard. The ground was frozen and we could only dig a small hole. It was uncomfortable with three people firmly squeezed inside. We covered

the hole with boards and thin stones, covered it all with yak dung, and

### Dukarkyab

In the early 1980s, when I (the author of this book) was in primary school, two girl classmates skipped class and went to Dondrubling for fun. The next day, the teacher denounced them in front of the class. Based on the girls' explanation, the teacher drew an exaggerated cartoon of the two girls on the way to Dondrubling, standing near the dried noodle shop, licking noodles in a corner. The teacher announced that the two girls were Dukarkyab and ordered us to repeat the name loudly. We did. The two girls were terribly embarrassed. Their faces were wet with silent tears. A derogatory meaning of Dukarkyab was thus fixed in my mind, though I didn't know what Dukarkyab meant until Tsering Sonam told me her story.

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<sup>57</sup> 'Cow demon and snake spirit' was a general term for those labeled 'bad elements', class enemies, landlords, and so on, and even included children of those so labeled. The expression was used by *People's Daily* in 1966 and Mao also used the term in his writing and speeches. This high level use of 'cow demon and snake spirit' made it one of the most common dehumanizing terms during the Cultural Revolution.

made a small hole for breathing. The next morning, traces of our night activity were evident in the dark, frozen dirt. We mixed soil with yak dung and spread it around before any visitors came.

I was mentally and physically exhausted by the night activity, nevertheless, I pretended to be an energetic housewife in fear someone might suspect we were hiding something. At midnight, we invited Dukarkyab and his sister Karlha, and Uncle to our tent for a meal together. They spoke Kham reasonably well. My husband's uncle was a monk, so he and they had a common topic.

Dukarkyab said, "This hole is hell. I can't suffer in the hole anymore," so we enlarged the hole that night.

Anticipating an investigation from the commune farm, my husband suggested we dig a new hole near a boulder not far from our tent. We painstakingly, in turn, dug the hole. When we encountered a big rock we couldn't move, Dukarkyab said, "Let me do it." He used a sledge hammer and broke the rock into three pieces with a shower of sparks. We moved the rocks around the slope and worked through the night. The rocks we had dug up were obviously different. Worried that someone would notice, we rearranged every rock. We then drove the livestock back and forth over the area until traces of the hole were gone. We dug that hole for three nights. Finally, it was big enough that they could comfortably move around inside. We also made a small hole from which they could view the whole valley. My family provided them with food every day. Sometimes they visited our tent late at night.

Dukarkyab and Uncle were eloquent, sensible men, and they had many interesting things to talk about. We liked them.

The Commune Leader, Kunga Gyamtso, sensed something was wrong in my home, but lacking evidence, he ordered my family to move to Dzando, near Lungpu Village. We prepared everything and were ready to move the next morning.

At midnight, my husband, Dukarkyab, and his sister put Uncle into a big bag and filled another, same-sized bag. The two bags balanced perfectly on the yak's back. We also loaded several other yaks. My husband drove them to Dzando with Dukarkyab and Karlha followed at a distance. After they reached Dzando and unloaded the bags near a big rock, my husband returned home.

We had prepared everything and were just about to leave when Kunga Gyamtso came and said, "We changed our mind. You should move to Bangchen."

This site was located in the opposite direction, but of course we followed orders. The next day, my husband went to Dzando to inform Dukarkyab, who said, "We have brought much trouble to your family. The commune leader has sensed this. We don't want to implicate your family. We will now take care of ourselves."

My husband didn't insist and transported the bags to Bangchen. I prepared two leather bags of *tsampa* mixed with butter and my husband brought a thermos, which we gave to Dukarkyab. After they left, I felt like a heavy burden had been lifted from my heart. My family was liberated from anxiety, nervousness, worry, and concern.

In spring, we moved from Bangchen back to Patang, where I delivered a baby. One day as I was drying yak dung, I saw two persons wearing Chinese suits waving to me. I washed fresh yak dung off my hands in a stream and approached. I peered at the two and realized they were Dukarkyab and his sister. When they said that they wanted to visit my home, I uncomfortably said, "Please don't come. My son can talk now. I'm afraid he will talk about your visit last year." Then I felt regretful and said, "I can't decide. Please wait a bit. I'll ask Uncle."

I went to our tent and told Uncle, who said, "How can you possibly refuse a guest in front of our tent? Please bring them here."

I said, "The child will repeat what we've done."

Uncle said, "I don't think he will remember."

They came inside. My son had no memory of them. Dukarkyab said, "We've been living in mountains and villages in turn."

My husband was afraid unexpected visitors would discover them, went up the hill, pretended to herd sheep, looked around the valley, and noticed several horsemen. He immediately hurried home and reported what he had seen.

Dukarkyab said, "We will hide. If they stay in your home, we won't return." He and his sister then raced up the slope and hid among boulders.

The horsemen were township government employees. I approached and greeted them. One said, "We've come to hunt pheasants. Are there any on this mountain?"

Afraid they would discover Dukarkyab, I said, "No, there are none here," I pointed in the opposite direction and said, "there are many over there."

The man said, "Let's go over there," and they left.

I was astonished by Dukarkyab and his sister's return while the township horsemen were still in sight. Dukarkyab said, "Uncle is sick. He wants to see you and your son. He's missing you."

That night, my husband went with them and brought Uncle to our home. They left the next morning and continued their precarious way of life until one summer day when Butrayak, Sonam Panjor, and Soga - three vanguards - were hunting in the mountains. Their hunting dogs smelled something and swiftly ran barking through the shrubs to the boulders. After a while, the dogs barked as if someone was throwing stones at them. The three men raced up and saw quilts in the sun. They looked around and found three people in the shrubs. Butrayak asked, "Who are you?"

One young man said, "We are wild herb collectors."

Sonam Panjor said, "Aren't you Dukarkyab?"

Suddenly, the three refugees raced down the slope. The dogs chased them as the three vanguards pursued. First, the old man dropped out and then Karlha. They could not catch Dukarkyab. The vanguards grabbed Uncle and Karlha as she screamed in Amdo dialect to Dukarkyab, encouraging him to flee. Dukarkyab mumbled something and fled like a rabbit.

Butrayak, Sonam Panjor, and Soga had caught an old man and a young woman instead of wild game. They proudly escorted Uncle and Karlha to the township center. A crowd gathered by the road as the hunting dogs jubilantly hovered around them. Uncle had been sick for a long time. Unable to withstand intense exercise and excitement, he collapsed on the road. Soga then cruelly dragged Uncle to the township government yard.

Uncle's Kham dialect was poor. Communication problems between him and the vanguards drew the curious attention of Soga, who pointed to a chili and said, "What's this?"

Uncle said, "*Lazi*," a Chinese word.

Soga didn't understand and fiercely said, "What is this?"

"*Sipen*," Uncle said in Tibetan.

Soga didn't understand this either and loudly and fiercely said again, "What is this?"

Uncle said, "*Marakhatsa*" 'red hot mouth'."

The capture of these two 'outlaws' caused a sensation in Patang Township and Dondrubling Town. I and many others worried that Uncle and Karlha would reveal who were involved. Uncle and Karlha were interrogated and tortured. Uncle died two days later.

Trying to commit suicide, Karlha crushed her chest against a table corner, despite being under supervision. Her motivation was understandable. She didn't want to be tortured and expose those who had helped her. Karlha suffered from torture intended to extract a confession and was sent to Dondrubling, where her torture continued. After forty days, her hair had been completely burned away and her body was covered with bruises.

Many villagers were involved in this case. I never expected some to be involved. Some didn't confess at first, but later they did. This was the stupidest way of dealing with interrogation by vanguards. Those caught in brutal, endless interrogations craved less suffering and confessed whatever they were asked to confess. Consequently, there was no evidence to prove the fiction, which only made them suffer more.

A vanguard nicknamed Big Mouth approached my home where I was drying yak dung. I was afraid of him scolding me for lacking an enthusiastic attitude. As I took the basket off my back and was about to hold our dog. Big Mouth said, "Don't bother, I just need to talk to your husband."

My husband confessed everything about Dukarkyab to Big Mouth and was then summoned to the township. Big Mouth said, "How many religious objects did you keep for Dukarkyab?"

My husband said, "I am from a poor family. We don't have any."

"How many religious objects do you have?" Big Mouth asked.

My husband repeated the same answer during several interrogations and didn't suffer much.

In the early 1960s, religion was not completely forbidden, but religious practice was mostly done secretly. Butter lamps never stopped burning and people's religious activity never stopped. Religious motivation was strong, but secretive, for example, when visitors came, those in the home moved butter lamps to the dinner table, or used dark curtains to cover the windows.

### Protecting The Naturally Arisen *Mani* Stone

The Norbuling Mani was a main source of construction material for official buildings. Countless *mani* stones were moved to various construction sites. The *mani* pile grew steadily smaller. The temple was closed and its religious objects were moved, except for the naturally arisen *mani* because it was very heavy, but it was only a matter of time before this precious stone would be destroyed or taken away.

My husband died in 1988 and I then married Ganyok when I was forty-six. We lived together for more than a decade and then he died two months before we completed our new house in Dondrubling.

Here is Ganyok's experience:

Lama Terlodro was a hermit from Norbuling Village who escaped. No one knew where he was or what had happened to him. One day while crossing a river, an old woman clutched my sleeve and very politely said, "Uncle Terlodro, where are you going?"

I said in a shocked tone, "Are you dreaming? Look at me carefully. I'm not Lama Terlodro."

As I turned to leave, the old woman sobbed and said, "You promised that you would not forget me when I die, but you have already forgotten me."

I worriedly looked around for other people. There was nobody. She insisted so I said, "Yes, I am Terlodro and I won't forget you." Completely satisfied, she happily said, "What do you want?" "Arak 'liquor'," I said.

She then brought a bottle of *arak*.



Later, my reputation as a venerable man spread and many devotees clandestinely gave me gifts. I could get a bottle of alcohol every day.

One day when I was in Norbuling Village, a nun gave him a bottle of liquor. I took it to my friend, a middle-aged woman named Karmo, who scolded me for abusing alcohol and said, "If you want to drink, don't drink in my home."

I went to another family and they also refused. I was irritated and threw the bottle of alcohol against a wall, but the bottle didn't break. An old woman picked up the bottle and later regarded it as a holy object. With time, my indulgence in alcohol destroyed my reputation.

Karmo and I discussed how to preserve the *mani*. Finally, Karmo, other villagers, and I stealthily came to the temple late one night. I gingerly carried the *mani* on my back. We quietly walked through the village to Karmo's home, put the stone in her yard, and rested. We tried to move it to a room, but it was very heavy. Finally, four of us moved it into a room.

After a week, Karmo was interrogated about the *mani*. I was afraid someone would search her house. She said, "Someone has already revealed that I have the *mani*. I did not confess anything, although I was tortured."

I said, "I'll keep the *mani* in my home. I'm not from Norbuling Village so they won't suspect me."

After she agreed, I carried the *mani* through the darkness. I was scared, anxious, and nervous. I imagined someone pursuing me and hated the wild dogs barking at me. I beseeched the *mani* to safely let me reach my home. I passed through Dondrubling and then rested. I felt the *mani* was very heavy and I could not lift it. I prayed and chanted, and then I could easily carry it. This proves the naturally arisen *mani*'s miraculous power and increased my devotedness to the *mani* and religion. I swore that nothing would ever shake my faith and that I would protect this holy natural *mani* with my life.

When I got home, I put the *mani* in a moist butter bag made of leather. I sewed the bag shut and covered it with other butter bags. It emanated a strong butter smell and I thought no one would be suspicious. Then I heard the sound of religious ritual come from the leather bag. The sound of drumming, chanting, and various religious

instruments made my heart pound rhythmically. I was astonished and immediately closed the door. I worriedly moved the *mani*, but the sounds continued. I then put the *mani* at the bottom of the pile of bags. The sound continued. An ambivalent feeling of sacredness and fear rose in my heart. I hoped government employees would not visit my home.

One day, some government employees did come and asked many questions. My mind was concentrated on the sound from the butter leather. I thought they would also hear it and take the *mani* away. I nervously answered their questions. After a while, I realized that they heard nothing, which made me more confident and they eventually left.

I was happy about the presence of the holy *mani*. My devoted heart and unalterable faith sustained me.

One day, I was called to the township center by Commissar Zhang. His family name suggests he was half-Chinese. Commissar Zhang asked, "Where is the naturally arisen *mani*?"

I said, "I'm from Dzato. I have heard of the Norbuling Mani, but I've never seen a naturally arisen *mani* stone."

In fact I was originally from Dege. They tortured me to extract a confession. I did not weaken and eventually lost consciousness.

When I regained consciousness Commissar Zhang said, "Stupid! Someone has already revealed your involvement. If you confess, you won't be tortured," and showed me a paper.

I was shocked and disheartened by the statement of evidence that stated I had taken the *mani*. The paper was signed by seven people and also had their fingerprints, including Karmo's. I thought, "If, in, my stupid meaningless little life, I can make the natural arisen *mani* stone available forever, then that is a great accomplishment. I will never regret it, even if it costs me my life."

I was upset with Karmo and the others who had implicated me. I said, "I'm wrongly accused. I'm sure they hid the *mani* somewhere and then dared to certify such testimony."

Commissar Zhang said, "Human testimony is convincing. Be clever. Where is the *mani*?"

I said, "I don't know. I'm innocent. You should ask them."

This provoked the vanguards who tightly bound my wrists with wire and brutally tortured me to extract a confession and locate the *mani*.

They poured gasoline on my hair and burned it. The smell of burned hair, smoke, and my groans filled the room. My head ached unbearably.

They said, "Give up the *mani* and we will release you."

I said, "I really don't know where it is."

They then bound my thumbs together and hoisted me to the ceiling. One moment - even less than one moment - was like Samsāra, an eternal ocean of suffering. My feeling of pain excruciatingly expanded to infinite misery. My mind fell back and dissolved into nothingness that was not even suffering, but a single feeling of dark emptiness.

When I regained consciousness, I was on the floor and my arms were numb.

The next day, Commissar Zhang said, "This is your last chance. Where is the *mani*? Tell us or be executed."

I had two choices - the *mani* or my life. I recalled my oath. Was it worth dedicating my life to the *mani* and religion? Death was liberation from terrible torture. I then heard the sacred sounds of the *mani*, which increased my courage and determination. I thoughtfully said, "I don't know."

They tightly bound my arms and neck. Commissar Zhang said, "Do you have any questions? You will be executed."

I said nothing. Armed policemen put me in a truck, drove to a remote valley, pulled me out, and forced me to kneel. Gun muzzles touched the back of my head. I closed my eyes, thinking my life was over. Commissar Zhang approached and said, "You have one last chance. Where is the *mani*?"

My soul was numb. I had lost all desire to live. I said, "I don't know."

Commissar Zhang said, "You are incurable. Let's go back," and then they brought me back.

My hands were so swollen that the wire was now embedded in my turgid flesh. When I was about to be untied, I said, "Please, be gentle."

The man gingerly untied the wire as great pain pierced my body and heart. I nearly lost consciousness. My left hand was permanently disabled.

Commissar Zhang cooked mutton and sausage for me. I devoured it. He then gave me a certificate proving I was innocent. This

certification was effective when I later faced more trouble. Karmo and the others who had exposed me suffered more for wrongly accusing an innocent person.

I also hid the speaking Buddha image in my home for many years. When Norbuling Village reestablished the *mani* pile in 1984, I returned both the naturally arisen *mani* and the speaking Buddha image to the village. Everyone was shocked that I had the speaking Buddha image and asked, "How did you get it?"

I answered, "It is my secret." I never told anyone, including my stepson, how I got it.

The naturally arisen *mani* and the talking Buddha image were again displayed in the village temple. Thousands of devoted pilgrims full of ecstasy, emotion, and prayer came to the temple, aspiring to purify their hearts and eager for Buddha's blessing. The natural arisen *mani* satisfied and fulfilled the great needs of these hungry spirits.

Ganyok died in 1999 when he was sixty years old. My son, Kunga Dondrub, a monk of Dondrubling Monastery, was responsible for his funeral. When Kunga Dondrub dismembered the corpse and gave it to hungry vultures, he found deep scars on the wrist bone and skull that indicated the torture my husband had endured. Kunga Dondrub preserved the skull for religious purposes.



# CHIMÉ

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Chimé (b. 1938) of Makra Village participated in the rebellion at Gling Monastery in 1958, was a fugitive in the mountains of the Yangtze River gorge for nine years, and joined the production team in his village beginning in 1967.

## King Gesar's Failed Divination

I was born in the 1930s [and narrated events that took place in 1958] in Makra Village. When I was young, my physical strength enabled me to do things that I cannot imagine doing now. For example, I swam across the Yangtze River, which made many people think I was crazy.

The Gling Monastery abbot was a young lama named Jara Penpa Rinpoche. The Chinese ordered him to attend a meeting. He foresaw that this was a bad omen and refused. Jara Penpa Rinpoche then called an urgent meeting to discuss the issue of the Chinese arresting people. Most men came on horseback with rifles slung on their backs. I didn't have a rifle so I joined the group, holding the handle of my sword, which was stuck horizontally through my sash. The lama came out from his room, followed by some monks. Riders dismounted and bowed to show respect to the lama, who said, "Today is the day when we know what our future will be. We'll know whether we'll win the war or not."

I listened curiously, thinking the lama would make a divination. The crowd quietly listened. Jara Penpa Rinpoche continued, "Please choose the best fifty marksmen among you." When some men raised their hands, several monks told them to assemble on one side. Men recommended each other until the required number was complete.

I wondered, "What will they do? Will they go fight?"

Jara Penpa Rinpoche pointed to a rock near the crowd and said, "A lammergeyer will land on that rock soon. Once you are ready, shoot that bird. This is crucial. If we kill the bird, we will win the war."

Everyone immediately put their right hands to their foreheads, looking for any bird. I saw nothing but blue sky and white clouds. A bit of doubt rose in my mind. Suddenly someone pointed to a black dot on the horizon and shouted, "The bird! The bird!" Like many others, I could not see a single bird. The bright light affected my eyes and I could only squint at the sky. But then I did see a bird approaching, and getting bigger as it flapped nearer. People were amazed and started talking. Some shouted, "Keep quiet!" A big lammergeyer approached, circled, landed on the rock, and adjusted its body and wings as though seeking the most comfortable position.

Fifty cold rifle muzzles all pointed at the bird. Nobody doubted anything could survive the coming hailstorm of bullets. The fifty rifles were loaded. Every rifle was aimed at the same target. One man said, "One, two, three!" then what sounded like a thunderstorm ensued. Someone shot twice. The smell of gunpowder filled the air as the gunshots echoed from a distant valley. Amazingly, no one hit the bird, which flew away.

Jara Penpa Rinpoche pondered and then said, "We can't do much. Catastrophe is inevitable," and slowly added, "We have one more chance. I need a fresh heart from a white male yak."

This task was carried out by young men who had no rifles. Yaks were grazing on a nearby hilltop. I and several other men searched and found a white bull yak and drove him back to the monastery.

A man slaughtered the yak, removed the bloody, dripping warm heart, and handed it to the lama, who said, "Put the yak heart on the same rock that the bird landed on." He and thirty monks then dressed in ancient warrior costumes and held ancient weapons that were stored in the monastery for religious dances. Holding banners and colorful flags, the lama and monks mounted horses and marched near the hilltop. A monk blew a conch shell. The lama raised his sword to the sky and shouted, "*Ki he he!*" which was echoed by

monks and the audience, like the shouting from a crowd at a race horse festival.

Rearing up on its hind legs, Jara Penpa Rinpoche's white horse raced down the hill, followed by the monk troops. Shouting mingled with the sound of galloping and then the shouts were echoed by the crowd, giving confidence and encouragement. It seemed that the troops were unstoppable. Waving his sword, the lama approached the rock and slashed the yak heart into two pieces, followed by another wave of shouting, as though celebrating a victory.

### Stealing Horses

Jara Penpa Rinpoche proclaimed himself to be King Gesar and titled his thirty young monks 'Gesar's thirty generals'. A well-known episode in the King Gesar epic describes stealing horses from the enemy. Jara Penpa Rinpoche suggested following this example. Dazang, an aggressive, short-tempered, energetic young man, volunteered to steal horses from the military camp at the Tsanda Township site, and asked for two helpers. I and many other young men raised our hands. He chose me and another man. He picked me because I was a good swimmer and he probably thought we would have to cross the river. The three of us crossed the Yangtze River on horseback and then marched to the Tsanda Township location where the military kept forty to fifty horses.

On the way, we met two women walking to the township center. They were holding long flashlights. Dazang said, "They must be spies," thumped his thighs against his horse, galloped to the women, and beat them with his horsewhip and then with his rifle butt. The women fell to the ground.

We continued on and saw many horses in an enclosure in the distance. Dazang assumed a sniper position behind a zigzag line of stone walls outlining barley fields. He aimed at the windows of a two-story building flying a national red flag. Dazang ordered me and the other man to open the gate to the horse pen. I was scared, but dared not refuse. We tiptoed to the gate and opened it. The frightened horses paced back and forth in the pen, alerting the soldiers, who shouted from the windows, and then aimed their rifles at us. Dazang fired.



Dust came from around the windows, indicating he had missed his target.

The frightened horses galloped away. Unfortunately, my horse was with them. I ran after the horses while calling to Dazang to help me. He rode back and I jumped on his horse behind him. Dazang asked me to bend down as we were galloping. He then turned and shot at the house. The soldiers fired back, but did not come after us, probably because they had no horses to ride. The horses ran toward the Yangtze River bank to avoid the two women lying on the road. Dazang ordered me to check to see if they women were alive. "If they are alive, kill them and throw them in the river," he ordered.

I obediently dismounted and approached the women. I turned one body over and was surprised that I knew her. Both women were alive. How could I kill someone I knew? Dazang had brutally beaten their noses and heads with his rifle butt. Their heads and faces were bruised and swollen and blood covered their hair and clothes. The hot sun-dried, dark blood on the ground was cracked.

Dazang shouted, "Are they alive?"

I shouted back, "No! They're dead."

We then forced the horses across the Yangtze River, and returned to Gling Monastery. Everyone was pleased with our trophy. Jara Penpa's troop went to the top of Gowu Mountain where we had a better view on Dondrubling. Patang troops were deployed in the south valley of Dondrubling. They were besieged by a PLA cavalry unit. Led by Tradé and Loyak, the Patang men broke through the siege, killing thirty soldiers with the loss of only seven of their own men. Other Drawu troops were deployed on North Mountain. All the surrounding mountain tops of Dondrubling were occupied by Tibetan troops.

Chinese took goats from rich people and gave them to poor people. Some poor people were offered a salary. There was a poor sister and her brother in Norbuling Village. One day, the sister violated local rules and cut shrubs on a slope of a holy mountain. The chief's chief assistant then caned her buttocks, but let her keep her robe on. When the Chinese came, they were nice and gave them goats and money.

Brother Dontra worked for the Chinese. One day, Chinese sent him to Mara Village to persuade people to join the socialist cooperative. He met Drandul, Bu Tsewa, and some other men among Jara Penpa's followers. Drandul asked Dontra, "Why do you come here? What is your purpose?"

Dontra was stupidly honest and said, "The Chinese sent me to tell people to join the socialist cooperative."

Drandul and Bu Tsewa tied Dontra up and discussed what to do with him. Some said he should be released and others said he should be thrown into the Yangtze River. Finally, they threw Dontra into the river where he drowned.

Drandul and Bu Tsewa also killed a woman nicknamed Seyima. She was a proletariat and worked for the Chinese. Drandul and Bu Tsewa threw her into the river near Norbuling. Since the deaths of Seyima and Dontra, proletarians who worked for the Chinese dared not go out alone.

### The Dondrubling Battle

We vowed to free the detained men and left before daybreak. We reached the foot of Dondrubling Monastery and found many men with horses and rifles, including monks in secular robes. Like many young men without a rifle, I was responsible for the horses. Dazang told me not to let the horses get away. The horses were panicked by the commotion of shooting and exploding shells in the distance and jerked, bucked, and neighed. I was anxious about losing control of the horses and then being blamed if our men lost the battle and needed to hastily retreat, but had no mounts.

No one dared march in the open to attack the enemy. Instead, several men pushed down a mud brick wall and then continued to push over the next wall in front of us. As we got nearer the enemy, the shooting grew louder. We pushed down the wall around the Zamkhen Family's home, and entered their yard. The house had two stories with a wooden wall in front of the second floor. Men went to the second floor to check the situation in front, but then came within mortar range. A shell struck the wooden wall, pushing it inside the house amid billowing dust and smoke. When the dust cleared, I saw men

coughing and slapping their ears to check their hearing. I also couldn't hear well after the explosion. A few men had minor injuries but, fortunately, no one died.

We soon reached the Botar Family yard. Botar Kalzang had been a successful trader and was appointed the responsible person for the state-owned prefecture nationality trading company, called Minzu Maoyi Gongsu in Chinese. Botar Kalzang was downstairs. When someone mentioned that Botar Kalzang was a Chinese lover, Bu Tsewa, a young man with no rifle, slashed Botar Kalzang's head with his sword. Bu Tsewa was immediately restrained by some elders. At first, Botar's cut didn't bleed, then blood oozed out and ran down his face. As Botar's face paled, he defended himself for being wrongly accused and attacked. He took a sword from Bu Tsewa's hand and dug into the wall behind the stairs. It was hollow inside, except for several rifles wrapped in cloth. He put the rifles in front of us and said, "Please take these rifle as my contribution to the Tibet cause and save Buddhism."

Bu Tsewa who had slashed Botar was terribly embarrassed by his impulsive action. Botar Kalzang joined the other Tibetan men that day. A month later, he surrendered and was sent to jail where he died.

Fighting intensified as several bombs hit the monastery on the hilltop. This magnificent monastery still stood firmly after the dust and smoke cleared. I saw two Chinese soldiers shot near the government building.

Patang riders rushed from the south valley toward the jail. Mortar shells exploded sporadically in front, behind, to the left, and to the right of the galloping riders. A few riders fell to the ground, some riders hesitated to continue forward, and still others galloped in random directions. A man on a white horse ran faster than the rest, leaving the other riders behind. He bravely crossed through explosions giving off puffs of grey smoke, and reached the gate of the jail. Admiring such heroism, we cheered, "*Ki he he!*" giving strength and inner power to all who shouted.

The white horse rider dismounted at the gate and attempted to break the door as shelling and shooting constantly threatened his life. He looked back. No one was with him. He then mounted and galloped away to rejoin his group.

The shooting continued until evening. Gradually, the intensity of shooting lessened and then stopped completely. Women with buckets on their backs came out from their homes to fetch water. The riverside was crowded in a short time and then the crowd disappeared. I don't know the number of casualties, but I heard that two of our group had been killed and a few injured.

The PLA refused to come out from their fortress at the jail. All of the soldiers cowered inside the wall, using mortars and big machine guns to shoot at us from a distance. We lacked heavy weaponry and both our assaults endured heavy shelling from the fortress. Our guns and limited bullets were incapable of taking the fortress. The PLA only need more time to wait for reinforcements. Time was on their side.

That night, we climbed up the hill to the monastery. Still later that night, we all fled. My group returned to our village. On the way back, we attacked a village commune building, but no one was inside. A few days later, more PLA soldiers poured into the region and I escaped to the mountain top, behind my village. Jara Penpa Rinpoche led his troops to mountain tops adjacent to the Yangtze River. His troops often attacked PLA units to regain a sense of adventure and excitement.

I followed Jara Penpa's troops to the mountain top near my village. A Tibetan man from Denkok, or somewhere like that, joined our group. I forgot his name. He spoke Chinese and had received PLA military training. He was good at military tactics and operating a machine gun. He taught us to lie down when encountering an attack.

One time, when we were pursued by a company of PLA soldiers, a Chinese officer from that company leaned against a bolder, smoking a cigarette. A man from my village aimed and shot him dead. Later, the man from our village was told by a lama that he should not have killed that Chinese because his fate and the Chinese man's fate were linked in terms of karma. Anyway, the Chinese soldiers noticed us and raced up the mountain, shooting and shouting. We also ran to the top, but unfortunately we encountered another group of soldiers at the mountain pass. The two groups of soldiers planned to sandwich us.

As hopelessness filled the air, thick fog came down from the rocky mountain pass and shrouded everything. It was the mountain deity helping us. The Denkok man ordered us to choose a defensive position and wait for his signal. He took Dazang with him and then disappeared into the fog. A moment later, we heard a machine gun firing and then the shooting intensified. I then saw the Denkok man and Dazang emerge from the fog. Dazang said, "Haha! Now the PLA are killing themselves." They had gone between the two units of soldiers and shot at both sides. The soldiers interpreted this as an ambush and began blindly shooting at each other.

We began shouting our war cry, "*Ki he he!*" as though we were launching an offensive. A few moments later, the fog lifted, revealing many young dead men in the two units of soldiers. We were also exposed and mixed with PLA soldiers so that they could not use their machine guns in fear of shooting their own soldiers. Every Tibetan had a knife and sword. We raised our swords to the sky and launched a vicious bloody battle. Some men also used their guns. I slashed two men and picked up a gun for myself, while my brother killed some soldiers until he was shot in the head. He died instantly.

The Chinese soldiers were tired and frightened. We broke through their siege while picking up guns and ammunition from dead soldiers. We lost about six and a few more were injured. The PLA lost over thirty men. More were injured.

We moved to another mountain, happy to have hindered the PLA's siege. Sometimes we came down to villages for food at night and then returned to the mountain again. Jara Penpa took some of his loyal followers to Denkok where he was born, raised, and then recognized as the reincarnation of Jara Penpa Rinpoche at Gling Monastery. Jara Penpa became a legendary fighter. He and his troops killed many soldiers and also attracted a PLA unit that specifically searched for him and his men on orders from their leaders. I heard that Jara Penpa and his troops were finally annihilated in a battle in Denkok.

I neither followed Jara Penpa nor escaped to the northern Plateau as did many others. I and some others stayed near a mountain of my village and came down to the village at night for food. We also crossed the frozen Yangtze River during winter and climbed to the

south mountain top where a lama organized religious chanting at the mountain top when the PLA was not around. The lama said the chanting was for both the dead and living. We recited the mantras of Padmasambhava one hundred million times.

One day, we stole food and livestock from a commune near Patang. Later, two Tibetans and a few Chinese soldiers came on horseback, searching for something. We attacked and killed two soldiers, and captured the two Tibetans. We tied up the two Tibetans and brought them to a cave. After discussion, we all agreed to kill them to avoid future trouble. I was ordered to be the executioner, but I didn't want to do it. It was already late in evening and I soon fell asleep. When I woke up, the sun was already shining on my face and the two Tibetan captives were also deeply asleep. I woke them up and said, "I don't want to kill you. You two run away now. I will tell the others that you were gone when I woke up. Please don't tell the Chinese about us."

I then untied the two men who thanked me and then raced down the slope.

I lived in the mountains for nine years and thus avoided the worst times. In the mid-1960s, the Chinese stopped arresting people and the PLA withdrew from most places. Sometimes I went to my home at night and left before dusk. Gradually, I began to stay during the daytime and participated in the commune work. I showed my enthusiasm by putting two small red flags on my plow yaks' horns when I plowed. A year later I became a team leader in our commune.

The Culture Revolution was full of meetings, public struggles, and destruction of superstitious traditions. One memorable event was destroying an earthen pyramid in the Oga Family' kitchen. Oga's grandfather lived to be over one hundred and they had put his corpse there many years earlier. According to tradition, the family stored the corpse inside an earth pyramid and sealed it with mud in order to retain the longevity and prosperity. The pyramid was stained by years of cooking smoke.

We opened the pyramid, found the corpse had been mummified, and dragged the corpse to the center of threshing ground to publicize this superstitious tradition.

In 1958, most people abandoned their homes in Norbuling Village and escaped to the Northern Plateau. Some fugitives returned home earlier than others. Boys and thieves went house to house, looking for food and valuables.

The grandfather of the Desar Family had also died when he was over one hundred years old. The family then kept his corpse in an earth pyramid in their kitchen. Burglars curiously opened the earth pyramid and dug out the corpse, dismembering it in the process. Later, dogs dragged pieces of the corpse here and there. In the winter of 1958, a boy who lived next to the Desar Family found a piece of dried flesh and bit and chewed it. Someone saw the boy was eating a human arm and reported to his mother. The mother said, "How much did he eat? It's too late to stop him so let him eat it all." The boy was then called Buttock Meat.

I lived in my village and never expected to move to a better place. I married and raised children. I never learned to read and write. Farming was my livelihood.

# DORJE TRASHI

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Dorje Trashi (b. 1946) of Lungda Village was a fugitive and had experiences similar to those of Sonam Trashi. He witnessed his mother's death and, along with his three sisters, ended up in an orphanage in Norbuling. He described his years of starvation and stealing food whenever he could. After joining a labor force, he became a commune butcher. The years of the Cultural Revolution were a painful experience. Norbuling Village is his current home.

## My Fugitive Life

I was born in the upper valley in Lungda Village in 1946. I had two sisters and one brother. When I was a child, I raced up and down slopes, barefoot and naked, chasing frisky yak calves back to my family yard. My oldest memories are all about chasing baby animals and climbing over boulders without wearing any clothes.

One day, Uncle came to my home and angrily said, "Everyone is escaping. Are you waiting to be arrested and killed? Get ready to move! Now!" Brother and Mother loaded some of our belongings on several yaks before dawn. They took down the yak hair tent and packed, tied, and loaded it onto two yaks. The tent had two pieces - the top cover and the side sections. It was too heavy for one yak. We waited for Uncle's family and then, when they arrived, we set out.

Every evening we stopped for the night. Unloading, pitching the tent, and milking the yaks became daily routine.

We stopped at Jala Mountain one night and the next day reached the Rinpo Area where black-necked cranes<sup>58</sup> and other migratory birds nested on wetlands. We had relatives in this area, but

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<sup>58</sup> *Grus nigricollis*.



they had vanished without a trace. We continued our journey, repeating our now established daily activities. I had lost count of how many days passed by the time we reached Gozhung, an immense grassland at high altitude. All trails seemed to lead here, as though it was the final destination of all fugitives.

The reflected sunlight from rivers and ponds seemed to follow us as we moved. It was a paradise for wildlife with few or no human disturbances over thousands of years. The fugitives might have unconsciously believed that this vast, amazing land would provide them a last sanctuary as it had provided protection to wildlife for millennia.

People had gathered and set out - acquaintances, strangers, herders, farmers, monks, and laypeople, grouped by family, clan, villages, and even entire tribes. The size of these groups ranged from two or three families to hundreds of families. Tibetans, yaks, sheep, and horses formed huge camps, where cooking, arriving, leaving, fetching water, and herding were daily activities. Groupings were based on where people were from. We all looked for people from our home village.

As soon as we camped, we heard the Drawu Chief's announcement that men between the ages of eighteen and sixty should join militia groups of resistance. Any qualified candidate who failed to join the insurgency had to pay a yak with a saddle as compensation.

Father was so sick he was unable to walk. He and Grandmother both needed help to ride, eat, and go to the toilet consequently, Father was exempted from militia duty. My two uncles and Brother were not excused. My two uncles had rifles called *gepa* type 38. Brother met his friend, Dungtruk, who had a pistol, locally called 'twenty bangs' since it held twenty bullets.

Dungtruk was the chief police officer in Trindu County and fluent in Chinese. He joined the government with Samdrub and Getra, who both later became government leaders. However, Dungtruk chose a very different path. Upset by government policy, he stole twenty guns from the county police station and gave them to Dzomnyak Monastery, which became a rebel center. He kept a 'twenty bangs' pistol for himself. His actions greatly embarrassed the Trindu County government.

Deployment of the insurgent forces went badly. The sudden appearance of fighter planes drew attention, especially from those who had never seen an airplane before, while it frightened those who had experienced the bitterness of airstrikes. The roar of the planes grew louder as they descended, dropping bombs that fell and exploded with towering pillars of rising black smoke. The planes' machine guns cut lines of intense gunfire across the ground, scattering people and livestock. Yelling, exploding bombs, and gunfire were the only sounds in the area. In this chaos, my uncles and Brother became separated and ran in different directions.

My uncles galloped to our camp and, almost jumping out of their saddles, bellowed, "Damn! Everyone is running and you are still here. Load! Move!"

Without their help, we could not go anywhere. Grandmother and Father could not move without assistance. My sisters and I were children. Mother did not know what to do. However, Older Uncle's scolding was part of his character and we were used to it.

My parents worried about Brother's whereabouts. When Mother asked about Brother, the uncles only knew that he had run in a different direction than the one they had taken. Not knowing if he was alive or dead brought sadness to my parents. Mother sobbed for days.

The uncles put Father and Grandmother on their mounts. We took all we had and moved to an upper valley. Our small group consisted of three households. The uncles believed a big group would attract airplanes and that it was safer to remain in a small group.

We met a group of sixty to eighty Patang households, who were camped. Most of their livestock had been left behind. In the center was their biggest tent where monks chanted for the dead and prayed for the living. They welcomed us, believing that more people would make their group stronger and easier to overcome difficulties. Uncle politely declined, saying that children, elders, and sick people would only impede their group. We continued toward a glacier, moving up the upper valley along a rocky mountain.

We headed toward one of three mountain passes. The Patang group was moving toward the middle pass and another group was moving toward one of the side passes. I thought the different passes led to different places. This was why, I reasoned, we chose our own

route and why Uncle had refused to join the Patang group. However, all the three passes led to the same huge valley. The lower part merged with another endless plateau. The pattern of the land seemed to repeat itself.

The Patang group camped downstream while we camped in the upper area. Uncle deliberately avoided joining the big group.

The next morning, a thin layer of snow covered the valley, making people and livestock more visible. We heard aircraft and stared at the sky, but saw only clouds and sunbeams penetrating the thin, fickle clouds. My heart throbbed as my blood raced. I was terrified. Mothers constantly chanted prayers. Two planes crossed through gaps in the clouds, and then reentered the clouds and vanished, but their noise remained. The planes were soon visible again and dropped bombs that exploded in the river, pools, and on mountain slopes, killing yaks and people. Machine guns shot at us. We ran toward the riverside. We had heard that if you were by a riverbank, the reflection of sunlight made it difficult for those in the plane to see you. The bullets fired from the planes deeply thrust themselves into the top layer of organic material on the grassland and were thick enough to draw a horizontal line on the slope. The gun barrels were aimed at the ground. Their bullets bounced up from the ground, like hailstones striking the ground. The plane continued dropping bombs and shooting at the Patang group, and then it left.

Three watchmen - one each from Patang, Rinpo, and Pacha - were positioned at three mountain passes. Later that day, I heard shooting and another sound. Looking toward the source of the sound, I saw hundreds of mounted, uniformed soldiers approaching. Uncle angrily scolded, "Danger! Move! Everyone is running. Why are you doing nothing?"

Loading was easier since we had not unpacked most of our belongings. Not everyone fled. Some Patang men, led by Tradé, valiantly galloped down from both sides of the river toward the Chinese soldiers. Tradé, one of two leaders of the Patang group, had killed a Gawa County police chief. Knowing surrender was impossible, he was courageous and desperate.

My family fearfully ran up to the glacier in the opposite direction. I heard guns. Machine guns gave short, intense noisy bursts

between spaces of silence. This sound resembled the sound of a collapsing stonewall in the rainy season. A bit later, the sound of shooting alternated between being loud and faint, and continued sporadically in the distance.

We passed meadows, reached a rocky area, and then went on to the glacier. Its rough surface made it easy for both people and livestock to walk. Certain crevices were big enough to hold a yak. I peered down into some crevices as I held Sister's hand. Melting snow made the deep glacier wall unstable. Water flow created long narrow tunnels. I saw dead yaks and sheep in a narrow gap between two giant, icy walls. I also heard a dog barking from deep inside the crevice. "Poor dog, no one can rescue it," I thought.

We passed the glacier and went on down a hill. When we met people from Patang, Rinpo, and Pacha, they told us that two men had been killed. One was a monk from Bachen, who belonged to the Rishul Family. I don't remember the other man's family name. One man was injured. A bullet had passed through his chest and out of his back, leaving small holes. They hoped his internal organs were not injured and carefully treated him. The next day, he had meat soup. I don't know what happened to him later. They said that they had killed at least five soldiers in revenge.

My family had no particular destination. Our travel was totally random. We went west, north, south, and finally east. The east was where we had escaped from and where most Chinese were. I wondered why we were heading toward where we did not want to go.

We eventually reached Totsé Township, Drito County. Uncle asked an old herder wearing a shaggy sheepskin robe about surrendering. The old man said, "Don't surrender. They are arresting everyone, even women."

Uncle was our guide and decision maker and led us to areas he was familiar with. He knew the names of mountains and rivers in that area, which was close to Rashul.

A big valley had yaks, sheep, and abandoned tents with property inside. Uncle did not allow us to take anything from the tents and did not allow us to kill yaks and sheep that did not belong to us. He said, "We even can't keep our own property, so why should we take others? It is stealing."

A woman from Norbuling Village joined our group for some days. She took a new otter skin robe from an abandoned tent. When Uncle saw this he angrily scolded her and ordered her to return what she had taken if she wanted to stay with our group.

Some people tried to control abandoned sheep and yaks. Many times, I saw a family or two families jointly, trying to round up several hundred abandoned yaks and sheep, as if they had found a treasure, crazily racing up and down after a few disobedient yaks from among hundreds of yaks. Uncle could not understand why some people deliberately made their own life miserable. He thought they were shortsighted, greedy, and stupid. He was right. Whatever livestock they accumulated during their journey had to be abandoned when they encountered Chinese. If they surrendered, they had to give all their livestock to the commune. In doing so, they risked being labeled rich nomads. If they had many livestock, it would prove that they were rich and, therefore, exploiters of the masses.

Uncle provided food by hunting. He was a good shot and never wasted a bullet. He could kill two blue sheep with one bullet. He knew exactly when the blue sheep came for water and waited until two blue sheep heads formed a single line to pull the trigger. Bang! The bullet penetrated both heads, spilling warm blood. We ate meat day and night. Generally, we consumed one blue sheep per day. Uncle met our needs with his shooting skill. Occasionally, we had yogurt and milk.

I played with my cousins in nearby valleys and hills. Games such as hide-and-seek transported me from harsh reality to an imaginary world. Our games ended at dusk and we had to return to our camp. My heart sank with the thought that Father might have died. Then one day, his death became reality. He lay on a half-full leather bag that served as a cushion. His health had deteriorated and he moaned day and night. He asked me and my two sisters to come and said to me, "You are a man. Listen to your Mother. Take care of your sisters." His eyes were wet.

We sobbed and nodded our heads, accepting what he said. He then slept and never woke. Uncle said we should move. We left Father there with his clothes and bag. Everything was untouched, just as though he were alive. Father was a true burden during our odyssey.

Though his death made things easier for us in some ways, I missed him. I longed for his giant hands and powerful arms lifting me into the air. I sobbed inwardly each time I saw Mother's damp eyes.

We camped in a rich pasture to graze our livestock and stayed there for two months without incident. Then one day, we saw a group of people in the distance. We thought they were Chinese and prepared to move up to the glaciers again. As they came closer, we saw that it was an entire tribe from Hashul with their livestock. They camped below us. Soon, smoke from their cooking fires filled the valley. It seemed blue fog was floating everywhere.

Before daybreak we heard planes that began bombing and shooting, sending up flames in the distance. PLA soldiers with machine guns swept the unlucky camp. Shooting and bombing were concentrated on that crowded valley, killing men, women, children, and livestock. I saw three children in lambskin robes hit by a series of bullets from machine guns. Blood oozed through their robes. Many men ran toward us and then fell. One handsome man was gunned down near us. He was wearing a lambskin robe covered with black silk and a red tassel was tied in his braided hair.

We continued running up the mountain pass and then rushed down the other side of the slope. Later, Trashy Chophel hurried down from the mountain with a rifle on his back. He was Uncle's acquaintance. He panted, "Many were killed and the rest were arrested. Only I escaped."

We headed toward Dondrubling, approaching the place where most Chinese were. We cut some meat from a few of the many yaks that had been killed in chaotic shooting.

### Gakla People Kill a Chinese Man

We met people from the Gakla Six, a collection of six villages near the Yangtze River. This was a major part of the Drawu Chief's territory. Gakla Monastery was the center of the six villages. I saw a tall, pale-faced Chinese man in a black suit, riding a horse amid a group of Gakla people. They said he was nice and they did not kill him. Gakla Village neighbored our own village and their livestock often mingled with my family's livestock.

All the Gakla men, led by their leader, hid on the mountains to avoid arrest. However, after a time, this life was tiring. Their wives and children were in the villages. The first leader wanted to end this precarious life, led all the men and monks back to the villages, and handed over their weapons to the Chinese work team. The leader said to the work team leader, "I led people away from the villages. It is all my fault. The men are innocent. If the government wants to arrest me, please do so. Leave the others alone."

At the beginning, those who had returned were welcomed, praised, and told that they had returned to the motherland's warm embrace. Some days later, however, things changed. Soldiers came to the village and began arresting men. At that time, few weapons were available because most of the guns had been confiscated. Men, including monks, got angry and killed work team members with stones, knives, sticks, and hidden guns, but they hesitated to kill one Chinese man, a gentleman, who was learning the local dialect and customs. They took him with them from their village to Gozhung, nevertheless, his life ended tragically. When planes were crossing over the area and troops were advancing on the ground, the Chinese man tried to escape. I saw him on a horse galloping toward the Chinese troops. Holding sticks and stones, yelling at him to stop, the Gakla men and monks chased him, pulled him from his horse, and beat him to death.

### *Lhawa* – the Spirit Medium

A *lhawa* from Gegye was in his forties and had six or seven children. Some were about my age. They lived in a big cloth tent. Smoke stains had obscured the original cloth colors. They had several fierce dogs that were chained and slept near the tent during the day, but unchained at dusk. The dogs barked and circled the tent throughout the night. My cousins and I went to see the *lhawa* perform when people came and asked him to divine the whereabouts of their lost relatives. He put on his costume that included a spectacular hat decorated with deity images. He lit incense in front of a small shrine at the back of his tent, chanted, and threw a few barley grains into the air. His chanting was melodious and full of rhythm. I enjoyed the

chanting and memorized it. He dramatically shook his two-sided drum. He frowned, visualizing another world, shaking his head, and then he was completely possessed. His ambiguous speech required interpretation. Sometime, the consultations gave hope but, at other times, brought disappointment. He was generally given meat and butter as a consultation fee.

People were eager for information, particularly for news about their relatives' situation. Information providers, such as *lhawa*, were in great demand. The *lhawa* frequently performed and I was eager to watch. It was also a good way to kill time. I imitated the *lhawa's* action and recitations for my cousins, who enjoyed my performance. My 'possession' seemed real to many people. A herder even wanted me to divine for him. Uncle observed this and said, "This is an ill omen. What are you doing? You will be possessed by an evil spirit."

I did not imitate the *lhawa* when Uncle was present.

One day a local herder came, not for a consultation, but to trade. The herder wanted one of the *lhawa's* dogs for which he offered one male yak. The *lhawa* agreed. I wondered how the herder would walk way with that fierce dog. He bravely gave the dog a piece of meat and then grabbed the chain from the *lhawa's* hand. The dog did not bite him. I had heard that if you grab the chain, a dog will not bite you, because the dog thinks you are his master. My observation proved this to be correct. Some days later, we moved and the *lhawa* moved in a different direction.

We wandered, grazed our livestock, camped, met new people, joined others, and left still other people. We eventually came to Nyanchen Lake in Rashul. This was the area where Uncle had spent his childhood. He knew the name of every river and hill, and knew where the gazelles and blue sheep watered.

We lived for a some days in a big cave located in the south of a narrow gorge with a river running below. It was thus well protected. Next, we moved to a nearby nunnery where we met a daughter and her mute mother. The daughter told us they were going to surrender in Jiangnan County<sup>59</sup>, near the Rinpo wetlands. She told us that if there

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<sup>59</sup> Jiangnan County became Rinpo Township a few years later.



was a chance for us to surrender, she would let us know. Uncle thanked her.

An incident had occurred at the nunnery. A monk from a village near the Yangtze had carried a bag of jewelry to two of his relatives - the Donda Family and another family. After they separated, they encountered soldiers. Kyimo, a famous local trickster, attempted to steal the bag. The monk was strong and beat him to the ground. Kyimo stabbed the monk's belly. Holding his belly and moaning, the monk withdrew a few steps, took out a dagger, and slashed Kyimo's head, cutting off a piece of skin that then hung around his forehead. Kyimo fled and came to our group. Zangpo Rinchen's father and Dawa's mother were there and bandaged his head. He thanked them. I don't not know what happened to them later.

### Embracing the Motherland

Zangpo and Lhamo from Norbuling Village came and said, "We will surrender. Those who surrender are treated nicely. Do you want to join us?"

Uncle agreed and so we followed them to Jiangnan County in a day's time. There were only black and white tents. We headed to the biggest white tent, which was the great monastery tent that had been designated the headquarters of the county's administration. Trashy Tsering, the senior assistant to the Drawu Chief, was in charge. He was wealthy and a native of Dondrubling.

His former boss was the Drawu Chief, the leader of rebellions and the most-wanted man.

Trashy Tsering had two servants, a characteristic of feudal society. Trashy Tsering might have continued the tradition of having servants, or maybe he was helping these two poor monks find work at the county center. Both servants were monks. One was Takyab, who had a hair-lip. The other was Trashy Penpa from Lungda Village. Both wore monk robes. Each held a teapot and filled cups when they became half empty.

Uncle knew Trashy Tsering well when he was serving the Drawu Chief. Trashy Tsering showed great hospitality. A narrow table was covered with candy, brown sugar, yogurt, wild yams with butter

soup, bread, meat, and *tsampa*. We sat crossed-legged behind the table. It had been two years since we had eaten much *tsampa* and gobbled down *tsampa* and bread. We were not interested in eating meat because it had been our main food for the last two years. I was literally sick of eating meat.

Trashy Tsering said, "It is wonderful that you have finally returned to the motherland's embrace. There is no road for those opposing the government."

Uncle was required to hand over his rifle to a Chinese man who registered it. Our survival had largely depended on that gun. It had provided us with meat for two years and had helped us through difficult times. I was sorry to that Chinese man take the rifle.

Trashy Tsering became a paid member of the CPPCC,<sup>60</sup> but eventually became a target of class struggle and endured public humiliation, hunger, and illness. He died in Norbuling some years later. His betrayal of the Drawu Chief did not bring security.

Takyab, one of the monks, maintained his identity as a monk until monasteries were reopened in the early 1980s. In the 1990s, he died naturally in a monastery. Meanwhile, Trashy Penpa, the other monk, married a woman in Lungda and had eight children.

Trashy Tsering said, "Go to your home village and join the production team there."

The next day, we moved to Norbuling Village. It was the autumn of 1960 when we arrived. The village leaders were Samten and Lhayak. Samten was tall, from Zurmang, married to a local woman, and spoke with an accent. Lhayak was a woman who had several daughters. They welcomed us and offered meat, bread, *tsampa*, and candies. Uncle's family stayed in Norbuling. Mother took me and my two sisters to Lungpu Village where we were assigned to live in the downstairs of the house of a nun named Ngakyak. Our room had been used as a storeroom and a shelter for animals in winter. A small square window provided ventilation. A skylight was near the ceiling. I was too short to peer through the window unless I piled up mud bricks to stand on. My older sister, Lhako, was taller than boys her age and could easily peer through the window. It took

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<sup>60</sup> The Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference.

me some time to see things inside after entering from outside on a bright sunny day because the room was very dark during the daytime.

We built beds of bricks and stones, and covered them with straw. I shared a bed with Mother. My sisters shared one bed.

Khandro, a native of Lungpu Village, eventually became the leader. She told us that our yaks must be given to the community, but we could keep one yak for each of us – Mother, my two sisters, and me. We thus could have four yaks for ourselves.

We killed a yak the night before we reached Norbuling, dried the meat, and put it in two leather bags. It would keep for a long time. I thought we should have killed more yaks to have more dry meat since we no longer owned the yaks and would have to turn them into the community.

We formally joined the commune team.

At harvest time, a threshing ground had to be prepared. Men dug dirt from a pit with shovels and then loaded the soil into baskets that women carried to the threshing field. Men made dirt into mud and then roughly pasted it on the ground surface. Children were not allowed to walk on the mud before it dried.

### A Fruitless Harvest

Harvest soon began and work moved to the threshing ground. Children were assigned to collect remaining grain from fields. A twenty year old monk from the Drongto Family in our village was in charge. We five teenagers played and, being lazy, ignored the work. The monk got angry and scolded us, but we laughed and ignored him. He then kicked us.

Tutob fought back by throwing stones. One day, when the monk beat us, Tutob took his pocketknife and struck the monk's lower leg. Luckily, the pocketknife was blunt and Tutob's blow was not strong enough to break the skin, but it left a visible mark. The work only lasted a few days and then we no longer fought with the monk.

A truck came to our village every day and took away the day's harvest, which only occupied one corner of the truck bed. I thought the truck driver was truly stupid. If the truck had come to the village

after the harvest was done, he would have had no more than one fully loaded truck.

No grain was left for the villagers - not even a single bag for the next year's seed. We worried about food for the coming winter.

Lung disease spread among livestock. Many yaks died and then were butchered, and the meat distributed to villagers. We could not consume all the meat in a short time so it spoiled and became smelly. We dried some meat and cooked the rest. We also received a small provision of barley from the commune. Mother carefully saved some barley for the bad days she feared would come. We eventually had a full leather bag of barley. Difficult times were indeed ahead.

After the harvest, all the men were called to a meeting in Drolkho's home. No one from my family attended because we had no adult men. I observed Drolkho's yard. Several Chinese soldiers guarded from the roof with rifles. The meeting did not end at the end of the day and women and children were not allowed to meet the men. Through translation, family members were informed that men were going to *xuexi*, a Chinese word for 'study', which was just a nice-sounding name for 'prison'. A truck came. All the men were loaded onto the truck and then it drove to Dondrubling. Many of those men never returned.

### Robbery

One day, Mother and Older Sister were working on the threshing ground. A truck came to the village and a squad of Chinese soldiers holding guns jumped out of the truck. Soldiers went from door to door, kicking each open, searching for food. They found barley, butter, and dried meat. I saw them taking food away. I took a sheep-head-sized chunk of butter to my bed and pretended to sleep.

A Chinese man soon rushed into the room, followed by a Tibetan interpreter who lived in Dondrubling. He was Tratsé's son. The darkness in the room meant it took them some time to adapt to the lack of light in the room. The soldier saw a leather bag of barley saved from our provisions. He took that and two bags of dried meat from the ceiling. The soldier put his gun muzzle to my head and said,

"Where is your cellar? Where is your other food? If you hide anything, I'll kill you."

I understood his sentence without translation and said nothing.

The interpreter said, "Don't be scared boy, he won't shoot you."

I was afraid that they would smell the rancid butter from my warm bed. They finally took the three bags and left. I peeked out the window and saw a truck half-full of food topped by the squad of soldiers, driving away in a cloud of dust.

### Grandmother's Death

Mother and Older Sister Lhako had to work. One of my younger sisters and I were students. Aunt lived in Bumda Monastery. Her husband was from Dege and skilled at carving wood printing blocks. Bumda Monastery had hired him to carve wood blocks and they then moved near the monastery. After her husband died, Aunt continued living there. She asked Mother to send Grandmother to her place so she could care for her.

Grandmother's weekly provision was given to my home. I took it to Grandmother four times in total. Bumda Monastery was eight kilometers from my village, but it took me two full days to go and return, counting a night there. I felt the days were too long and the land was too large.

Grandmother was happy to see me and asked about Mother and my sisters. I told her that our food had been seized and taken away. It was very tiring to visit Grandmother, who died during one of my visits. Two monks from Bumda Monastery came and chanted, drummed, and took her body from the room. At that time, religious activities were allowed.

### Mother's Death

Mother got sick and went to Norbuling Village to see the commune doctor, a woman from Dondrubling. When she said that Mother was looking for an excuse to evade work, Mother was sent to Dzando to convert pasture to farmland. Dzando is located in the uppermost

valley of Lungpu and had been summer pasture for the village. It was cold in winter and it even snowed there in summer. Mother worked there for some days.

One day, a villager, Lhamdze, carried Mother on her back to the village and put her on her bed. Mother tossed and turned, moaned, exhaled deeply, and said that she was very uncomfortable. Sometimes she tossed against my body at night. I was squeezed between her and the wall. I slept, hearing her moans in my dreams. When I woke in the morning, she was dead and lying on top of me. My older sister cried and called to her, but received only silence from Mother.

Ngakyak came down from the upper stairs, comforted us, and said that crying was not good for Mother's soul. Older Sister's loud cries then became subdued sobs. Villagers came to the room and took Mother away, leaving Older Sister and my younger sisters with me. We had a yak-hair cover and one sheep-skin robe. One of my younger sisters and I shared the sheep-skin robe at night, while Older Sister used the yak hair sheet as a quilt at night.

We were now orphans. When we were to be sent to the orphanage in Dondrubling, we refused to go. We were then sent to an orphanage in Norbuling Village.

### The Hard Winter of 1960

It was early winter and there was nothing to eat. Some elders had died. Khandro told us to all move to the commune center in Norbuling. It was a mud-brick bungalow in a long rectangular shape. The inside walls had been knocked down.

Lungpu Village had become a ghost town. If a thief had come, he could have brazenly searched from house to house, but would have found no food.

Sherab Chozang and other older men cut the joints from a pile of straw, milled the stem joints into brown powder, and boiled the powder in a pot as big as a huge monastery cooper pot. Finally, Sherab Chozang served this special food to everyone. I got my part and held my hot bowl against my side. The soup was dark. Bits of green leaves and dots of oil floated on top. It was a bit bitter. I would not have eaten it if there had been other choices, but there weren't. I

devoured it and licked the bowl. I wanted more, but there was only one bowl per person.

Sherab Chozang's mother was so ill that she could not come to the dining hall. Either Sherab Chozang was reluctant to visit her, or he deliberately ignored her to demonstrate that he was a model commune worker. Anyway, he was on duty all day long and asked me to take a bowl of soup and some *tsampa* to his mother. I visited her many times. She lay in bed, covered by her old sheepskin robe, and a big yak hair sheet, which she used as an additional quilt. I put the food by her bed and sometimes kept her company as she ate. I also helped her put her pillow made of a bag of straw against the back wall so she could lean against it.

Sherab Chozang gave me extra food as a reward.

It was a difficult, hungry winter, but it was not so cold because dozens of people lived in one big room.

The room where the food was distributed was called the *shitang*, a Chinese term for 'dining room'. I used to walk by the soldiers' *shitang*, which emitted an appetizing odor of fried green onions cooked with meat, triggering my desire for Chinese food. In contrast, our *shitang* had not even the smell of rotten meat. The only smell was burned shrubs and yak dung mingled with the odor of straw. This tiresome smell indicated the miserable nature of our lives.

People easily got sick. Flu and colds spread among us like mushrooms that grow on a fertile pasture during the rainy part of summer. Overnight, flu from a few sick people would spread among other and then there was coughing day and night.

Eating, sleeping, working, and meetings - meeting followed meeting and focused on criticizing the old society. The rich, landlords, and religious people were the targets.

There were three young sisters. Two had high sharp voices that filled the room over the silent majority.

Tsechu Gonpo from Zurmang was a creative revolutionary who criticized the rich class in a way that was ridiculous, but sly. Extremely patriotic and revolutionary, he directly pointed out individuals in the assembly and said they belonged to the exploiter class. He even made trousers for his children out of prayer flags.

One day after a meeting, nine people were identified as 'bad elements' and tied up with black yak-hair rope. Two men with rifles drove them to Patang where prisoners were converting pasture to farmland.

Such meetings continued all winter with the number of adult men steadily decreased. Even those with rifles who guarded prisoners could not escape from imprisonment. For example, an armed monk who guarded prisoners was suddenly a prisoner a few days later, and abused by others. He was tied and, with other prisoners, was slowly marched to Patang by two men holding rifles.

There were also prisons for women. Many young women were accused of being anti-socialist and thrown in jail. Taking revenge was the easiest thing. You didn't need to engage in a physical fight if you hated someone. Instead, you just told others that you had heard your target criticizing Socialism and public ownership and then they were surely put in a labor camp.

Tsechu Gonpo harmed so many people that his zealous revolutionary action could no longer be tolerated. One day, he was anonymously accused and arrested. Tsechu Gonpo's disappearance put those who accused others with no evidence on notice. Nevertheless, there remained plenty of passionate revolutionaries.

One large labor camp in Patang had 7,000 men and women who were forced to convert grassland to farmland. In the end, only 600 to 700 people of those 7,000 survived. My two uncles were unlucky. Both worked and died there. Another labor camp was in a remote valley near the Mekong. The death toll was high there, too. Some people were also sent to do road construction work in Chamdo.

Those labeled as serious criminals were packed in trucks and sent to Ziling. Occasionally, I saw military trucks passing by Norbuling Village. A soldier holding a rifle stood at each corner of the truck. Ropes were closely woven through the metal bars across and above the truck bed, creating a tight net. The heads of prisoners stuck out through the net. They were forced to sit crossed-legged or kneel. It was impossible for them to stand or stretch. The tight rope pressed down on their shoulders. Guards used a stick or a big monastery cooper scoop to beat the head of anyone attempting to



stand. Many prisoners who died on the way to Ziling were tossed out of the trucks.

### Disobeying a Teacher

Spring came and we needed to work the fields. Adults had been taken to mountains to convert pasture to fields. Children were organized into student units. No real teaching courses were offered. The head of each student unit was called 'teacher'. Teacher Jinpa from Dondrubling was assigned to be our leader and took us to a small plain called Baroktang, located at the conjunction of three valleys in the upper part of Lungpu Village. He held a small red flag, ordered us to dig sod to convert the area to farm fields, and said, "When I wave the red flag this way, you must stop working and come to me. If you don't work hard, you won't get food."

We were always hungry because the food was never enough. We dug sod, found wild yams and ate them. My mouth was full of the taste of dirt mingled with the taste of raw, wild yams. No one had the energy to dig sod. Instead everyone was busy collecting wild yams and putting them in their mouths.

Noticing that our work was making little progress, Teacher Jinpa waved the red flag. We went to his tent. He angrily said, "You did not work, so there's no food for you. Go work."

We returned to the work spot, looked at each other's faces, and then decided to ignore the teacher's command. We started walking to Norbuling, ignoring Teacher Jinpa's shouts. He could only follow us. When we reached the commune center in Norbuling, he accused us of being disobedient.

A Chinese man asked through an interpreter, "Who is your leader?"

We said together, "No one. We decided together."

Teacher Jinpa looked closely at our faces one by one, pointed to Trashi Jikme, a boy about my age, and said, "You are the organizer. Your face turned red. You're guilty."

Trashi Jikme nervously disputed this. It was amusing to see the redness of Trashi Jikme's face connecting to his red neck. We put our heads down and held our breath, attempting to control our giggles.

The teacher was stupid enough to believe this pink-faced boy was guilty.

We were children and thus pardoned, but adults could not find excuses. Each adult was assigned a certain area to dig every day and could not leave until they had finished their work. Even at night, some continued working on their assigned plot. Little or no food plus working day and night killed many. If someone did not come from their work at night, they might have died. These enormous stresses and difficulties made some go mad. Lhamtso from my village and Samdrub Mtsomo from Norbuling went mad, laughing and crying at the same time. Their families could do little to help them.

Trashhi Jikme's mother, a tough woman who helped mad people and carried corpses, said that she hoped to go mad or die.

One day we were sent to Kyanyetang, which is near Dondrubling, to convert pasture to farmland. Barley grain was sowed evenly across the newly cultivated land. We were supposed to cover the grain with soil, but we concentrated on picking up the grain and putting it in tins and in our pockets. Supervisors in the distance must have thought we were hard working children, painstakingly covering the seed, but in fact we were making this effort futile.

Lhamo Tseyak, a carpenter's wife, was the commune cook. Kind and trustworthy, she encouraged us to collect as much grain as we could. She said, "It's my fault if I don't cook barley for you. It is your fault if you don't collect grain." She didn't ask us to give her anything, but we did give her some grain. She washed the barley, boiled it, and then we had barley porridge.

### Tortured

The Norbuling Military Camp piled up rice, wheat flour, rice noodles, and dried noodles. The amount of goods equaled the height of the *mani* pile next to it. This pile of food in our hungry world was enticing enough for us to risk being caught and tortured. Kunga Chophel, Trawa, Tutob, and I sneaked past guards and got near the pile. Kunga Chophel and I had a bag and made our way to a wall of rice bags as Trawa and Tutob stood guard. I stuck my pocketknife into a cloth bag of rice. Rice flowed into our open bag as I squeezed

the congesting rice so more would pour out. Our bag was soon half full. I nodded to Kunga Chopel and we tiptoed out with the bag to where Trawa was waiting.

He looked at the bag and said in disappointment, "You only got half a bag? That's not enough for the four of us to share. Get a full bag. We'll watch and sound an alarm if guards come."

We reluctantly carried the half-filled bag back to the torn cloth bag of rice and added more. A powerful hand suddenly slapped my right ear, followed by silence. I was temporarily deaf in that ear. A Chinese guard had caught us, kicked my butt, grabbed me by the ears, and dragged me to the ground while calling other guards. Three more Chinese men came and took us to their office, which was the Norbuling Mani Temple. The soldiers had occupied it. Kunga Chopel and I were tied to poles in the corridor. A soldier mumbled something. I guessed he was asking where my knife was. He searched my pocket, found it, opened it, pointed it at my eyes, and continued muttering. It seemed he was going to gouge out my eyeballs. He then carefully drew a line on my forehead with my pocketknife. I felt a sharp burning, but no blood trickled into my eyes. Other soldiers slapped our faces as they passed through the corridor in both directions.

Later, however, a high ranking officer came to the corridor, caught a glimpse of us tied to the poles, said something to his subordinates, and then approached us. I was scared that he might beat me. He untied us, filled our pockets with beans, and set us free. Kunga Chopel and I blamed Trawa for his greediness that had caused us trouble.

The food in the communal *shitang* was barely enough to sustain life. A meal was like an appetizer. I wanted more food after a meal, as did Tutob. We demanded more food from the cook, who refused. We then asked for our next day breakfast in advance. If our demand was refused, we gripped rocks and threatened to break the *shitang* door. Lhamo Tseyak would then say, "OK, OK. Boys, here is your breakfast for tomorrow." We then devoured it. At breakfast time, we demanded our lunch in advance. We repeated such demands many times.

One day, Tutob and I decided to move from the orphanage in Norbuling to Dondrubling. My two younger sisters, Tutob, and I went to the *shitang* and asked for one week of provisions in advance. We said that we were going to steal food from military camps around Dondrubling.

Lhamo Tseyak said in concern, "Don't go. You won't get anything from Dondrubling. Try to steal food nearby."

We insisted and picked up rocks, pointed to the door, and said, "Yes or no?"

She said, "OK. OK."

After we got four peoples' provision for a week, we packed the food in a cloth bag with a pot, four bowls, and matches and started for Dondrubling. We didn't see anybody as we walked through Dondrubling and continued west. We reached Jalaknda on the outskirts of town where a jail was located. We looked for a place to stay and found a cave big enough for all of us to fit inside. I went to collect water from the river while my sisters and Tutob collected dung for fuel. We made a hearth of three rocks, put the pot full of water on top, put fuel under the pot, and lit it. Gray smoke quickly filled the cave as firelight projected our shadows on the cave walls. When the water boiled, we mixed in *tsampa* and then ate it. The week's provision was just enough for one meal. We looked at each other and burst into laughter. What would be tomorrow's breakfast? Getting our next meal was something we had to start doing immediately.

We chatted and told ghost stories. I was a good storyteller and told a story about a man who met an old silver-haired lady at midnight while crossing a bridge. The old lady grabbed his horse's tail. He then prayed and chanted and finally, he could move again. My younger sisters were scared and told me to stop telling such stories.

Suddenly, an old woman with short white hair entered our cave and said, "Children!"

My sisters screamed and Tutob hid his head under his arm.

I was closest to her and said, "Yes?"

She said, "Do you want to steal barley from the camp's threshing ground?"

We realized she was human and not a ghost, and agreed to go with her.

The fire in our cave had led her to us. My sisters stayed behind while Tutob and I went with the old woman. We crossed a river, reached the threshing ground, and collected grain heads in the dark. Our hands mostly touched straw, but occasionally we found grain heads. Tutob and I filled a bag with grain heads. I said, "Granny. Do you want to leave? We've got enough and we want to leave."

She said that she needed more so Tutob and I left. It was pitch black and we couldn't find our cave. We called my sisters' names and eventually located our cave. Tutob and I soon had a dreamless sleep until we were awakened by sunlight shining on our faces. We then removed the grain, roasted the barley in our pot with hot sand, and briskly stirred the popping barley grains with a palm-sized piece of wood. The odor of roasting barley filled the air. My sisters and Tutob picked up popped grains from the ground to nibble on. We soon had enough for a meal. The four of us shared the barley equally. Tutob and I each took a pocket full of roasted barley and walked toward the nearby prison.

A Chinese man came out of a white tent with a bag on his shoulder, climbed up a hill, bent down, and started to pick up yak dung. I snuck into his tent, located a bag of wheat flour, and excitedly called Tutob. He came, searched, and said, "Come! Come! Here's barley!"

I said, "Here's wheat flour!" We then took the bag of wheat flour to our cave, delighting my sisters. We made dough with cold water and baked it on the pot lid in hot ash. We also boiled water and added some handfuls of flour. We then had bread and wheat flour porridge for lunch and the same for dinner. After dinner, we decided to return to the orphanage.

The night was so dark that we couldn't see anything. We walked according to our memory. Occasionally, the moon peered through dark clouds and gave us a moment of guidance. We reached Norbuling before dawn and gave the barley and wheat flour to Lhamo Tseyak, who cooked it for us.

Children at the orphanage rarely shared food. There were two brothers and their sisters in this orphanage. One brother ate by himself, never sharing anything with his sisters or his brother.

Meanwhile, his brother shared food with his sisters, but not with his brother.

There was also a boy who slept day and night, and never attempted to steal or find anything extra. The orphanage provisions were all he had. "Maybe it's a good idea to sleep a lot," I thought.

The orphanage was eventually discontinued because there was little food and the children were a bunch of thieves, disturbing the army camps and other work units. The children were then sent to their own village

We went to Lungpu, but had no interest in staying in the nun's dark room so we moved to Lungda, the next village, where there was a small building that had been my family's winter shelter. The house had only two rooms and there was no door between them. The windows were small and had no glass. This house had been abandoned for a couple of years. The roof had not been maintained. The smell of mold mingled with the odor of smoke filled the room. It was awful. My sisters and I cleaned the rooms and moved in.

### A Bowl of Roasted Barley

One day in 1961, Tutob and I were sent to a water mill near the East Wind Production Team. A childless, single woman was in charge of the watermill. She gave us *tsampa* and a bowl full of roasted barley. We ate *tsampa* with cold water, put some roasted barley in our front robe pouch, and then left for our village. On the way back, we met Monlam, a boy three years older than me. He was picking undigested beans and corn from camel dung and then putting what he had found into his mouth. Camels were used to transport military goods. In their spare time, soldiers grazed camels near the river. The well-fed camels left dung that often got the attention of children.

Tutob shouted, "Do you like here or Norbuling?"

Monlam said, "I like here."

"Why?"

"There's plenty of camel dung here. I was unable to steal anything in Norbuling."

"I have a bowl of roasted barley for you, but the condition is that we want to hit your head with this stick," Tutob said, showing Monlam the stick. "What do you want?"

Monlam looked at the stick, thought for a few seconds, and said, "I want the roasted barley."

Monlam stretched out his head while clenching his teeth and tightly closed his eyes, preparing to be hit. He said, "*Ya*, do it. I'm ready."

I gently hit his head with the stick, but I heard the sound of my stick striking his head. I'm sure it was painful. Monlam inhaled through clenched teeth, and groaned. I handed the stick to Tutob as Monlam moaned, waiting for the second hit. Tutob hit very hard.

Monlam moaned, "*Ara, ara, ara, ara, ara!*" It was a miracle that Monlam did not fall unconscious. He held his head in both his hands while clenching his teeth and groaning. He slowly recovered as the pain faded and then took all our roasted barley.

### Killing a Goat

We were not the only orphans in this village. Rinchen and his sister, Tsering Sonam were also there, living in an empty two-story house. They had only one army coat for a quilt at night. Kunga Chophel was an orphan who slept in a straw pile in the communal threshing ground. I found that a pile of straw was warmer than no quilt so I joined Kunga Chophel, as Rinchen did later.

The commune had a big black male goat. If you said, "*Shishi*, goat, come here," the goat came to you and you could ride him. Children often rode it. Rinchen and I also rode the goat. One day Rinchen said, "Should we eat the goat?"

I agreed and we then rode the goat to Rinchen's house. When the goat refused to go through the door, I pulled his horns and Rinchen pushed from behind. As soon as the goat crossed the threshold, Rinchen slammed the door shut. We made sure that no one saw us as we entered Rinchen's house with the goat.

We grabbed the goat's legs and horns and tried several times to get the goat down, but each time he stood up, bleating in fright. Worried someone would hear, I grabbed his mouth with both hands to suffocate him.

Struggling in the downstairs room sent dust into the air. The goat rose again and ran inside the house. I inhaled deeply, filling my lungs with dust. This made me cough so hard and long that I nearly lost consciousness. We struggled with the goat for a long while.

Finally, I firmly held the goat's mouth shut, making him jerk wildly, stirring more dust into the air until he eventually lay still. After the goat was dead, Rinchen told his sister to bring a knife. We skinned the goat, cut the carcass into pieces, and cleaned the intestines and stuffed them with blood and chopped internal organs. We shared everything equally. I took my portion to my room under cover of darkness and for the next many days, Rinchen, Tsering Sonam, my sisters, and I had goat meat.

When the commune noticed the goat was missing, Rinchen and I joined the search for the missing goat with others, who speculated that the goat might have been eaten by wolves or dogs. When I heard such comments, our secret was suggested by my grinning face as I attempted to control my inward laughter. I agreed with these speculations about the wolf and dog. When I furtively glanced at Rinchen, he smiled joyfully.

### The Commune Discovers the Hidden Mutton

A sheep came to my yard, followed by eight more sheep that the commune had given us. I said to Tutob, "Look, this sheep isn't mine."

He immediately said, "Let's eat it," separated the sheep from my sheep, and chased it into my room. We put the sheep on the ground and I suffocated it by holding its mouth shut. Suddenly, Trashi Jikme entered the yard and said, "Is there a commune sheep here?"

Tutob covered me and the sheep with a big sheet of yak hair as the sheep continued jerking its legs.

Tutob went outside and said, "No. I didn't see any commune sheep here. Come search the yard and house."

Trashi Jikme said, "OK. Since the sheep isn't here, I'll look elsewhere." He left. We then butchered the sheep and shared the mutton.

We had a *dzomo*.<sup>61</sup> The commune wanted to take it and give us two sheep plus a female yak in return. I killed our sheep that night and we had sheep sausage the same night. Killing the sheep was my idea. My older

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<sup>61</sup> A yak-cow cross that produces more milk than a yak.



sister did not approve but I insisted, ignoring her protests. We covered the mutton with a yak hair bag.

The next day, my sisters and I asked if anyone they had seen our sheep to hide the fact we had killed it. Older Sister acted so well with real tears that she fooled most commune members. Her tears gushed from her eyes, not only because she was pretending to have lost a sheep, but also because of the years of hardship she had endured. Nevertheless, our performances could not fool the team leader, Dawa Drolma, who said, "Where is the sheep?"

"It didn't return last night from the mountain," I said.

"Go now and get it," she said.

I went to a nearby hill and waited, killing time, and then I returned to Dawa Drolma and said, "I couldn't find the sheep."

She said, "You're a liar," came to our home and pulled back the cover, exposing the mutton. I was speechless. She took the meat to the commune center and divided it piece by piece among all the villagers. We got our small portion as well. The only extra benefit for us was the sausage that we had eaten the previous night. The commune later returned our *dzomo* and took back the yak and the remaining sheep.

### Trawa and I Injure Each Other's Feet

Some years passed and the commune organized youths to collect herbs and shrubs in Rashul, which is located two days from the village. Trawa, Kunga Chopel, and I were in one team. The north-facing slope was covered with so many shrubs that we could collect many in a short time. Each of us made bundles of shrubs and then we played and hunted for marmots. We had a dog that was very good at finding marmots. When the dog saw a marmot, he chased it to its burrow. Simultaneously, Trawa threw his sickle, at the running marmot.

One time when Trawa did this, the sickle hit the ground, bounced, and struck my heel, cutting me so deeply that we could see white bone. Blood pumped out, filling the cut. Trawa tore his shirt and wrapped my wound. Unable to walk, I put my arms around Trawa and Kunga Chopel's shoulders, and hopped on one foot. We stopped

after a few minutes and then they went back to get the bundled shrubs. We repeated this again and again until we reached the camp that night.

Adults said I might be permanently crippled when they saw the wound. Trawa treated me nicely because he felt sorry for the accident. I did not see a doctor because I had no money. Fortunately, the wound healed with no infection and I was soon walking with a stick.

Tsechu Gonpo, the proletarian activist, was always first in setting an example when we were ordered to destroy temples and *mani* piles. He sharply criticized old society and actively led the class struggle battle. He was responsible for many people going to jail and never returning. His enthusiastic and patriotic passion, however, did not build up enough revolutionary credibility to prevent him from eventually being assigned to a labor camp. I believed that he was wrongly treated since he was a true proletariat and had nothing to hide. He had lost nothing in the transition from old society to new society. His family was from Zurmang and a few locals knew little about his past other than his family members were marmot hunters, wanderers, and beggars.

Two months after my injury, there was another accident, proving the inevitability of karma. While Trawa and I were working on the mountain near our village, we saw Tsechu Gonpo kill a marmot. Meanwhile, the marmot family ran into a burrow under a bed-sized rock. Hoping to get some marmot meat, we ran over to where he was.

A marmot family usually had several connected burrows through a system of underground tunnels. They also had shallow burrows used as temporary shelters. The size of the dirt pile in front of a burrow indicated how deep it was. Marmots are natural diggers. The small amount of soil by the burrow under the big rock suggested it was a temporary shelter. We dug into the burrow, hoping to catch the marmot, while the marmot dug from inside. The burrow got deeper as the marmot continued digging. When we paused digging, so did the marmot.

The clever marmot was not digging to go inside the mountain, but was searching for a tunnel to break through to the surface and

escape. Suddenly, the marmot broke through the soil behind the rock and, with soil on his head, raced toward a main burrow on the slope. My heel was not fully recovered and I could not run as fast as Trawa. I threw a rock, targeting the marmot, but it hit Trawa's knee instead. He fell, moaning, holding his knee, while the marmot disappeared into the deep burrow, behind a big mound of dirt. Trawa's trousers were soaked with blood. I supported him and we started to walk, one cripple helping another. Two months earlier, he had injured me because of a marmot and now I had returned this karma to him, also because of a marmot.

### The Death of Ache

During the Cultural Revolution, I became a member of the People's Militia. Young men and women in our village were trained to resist the Soviet Union invasion. We did not have guns so we used sticks and pretended they were guns. Our team leader had a wood pistol with red cloth at the end of its handle. The trainers were Chinese soldiers. I learned a few Chinese words in this process. For example, we learned what to do if Soviets came to our home.

An old woman said, "I would throw yak dung ash into their eyes."

"If that didn't work, what would you do?"

"I would throw chili powder into their eyes."

"If that did not work, what would you do?"

"I would slash their heads with my ax."

The Soviets never came.

Ache was a suspected spy working for India.

Ache, a monk from Dondrubling Monastery, was arrested after he was wounded in a gun battle. He and Trashi Gyatso were sent to prison for many years. When the government was going to release them to our commune, the activists refused to accept Trashi Gyatso. They said that we couldn't control Trashi Gyatso, that he was dangerous, and suggested that he stay in prison. The real intention was to make life difficult for Trashi Gyatso.

Ache was accepted. It was a blessing in disguise for Trashi Gyatso, but it resulted in disaster for the freed man, Ache.

Ache was questioned and tortured. Ngawang Dorje and I were members of low rank people's militia and we were ordered to watch the gate outside in mid-winter. We went inside a room where the activists were sitting around a stove and questioning Ache, who stood at the corner.

There were around twenty both male and female proletarian activists in the commune. That night about ten were present. Some activists were less active than others, for example Dontse, Palyak, and Thundro never beat anyone. They occasionally said, "Please confess."

Thundro was a nickname that meant 'Going Down'. Thundro had broken a taboo by marrying a distant cousin, whom he later divorced. He was short tempered and no one in the village dared make fun of him. One time, he and another man from the village did not like something. He and his friend shouted from the center of village, "We put our packed luggage on the wall. If anyone in this village wants to demonstrate their courage, we are here." This meant that they had already prepared their luggage and were ready to kill someone and then run away before someone catch them. Since they did not call to any particular individual, no one responded at first. Thundro continued shouting and insulting the village men, calling them fox and cowards. Some men gathered and decided to give Thundro and his friend a lesson. Thundro and his friend realized that their performance was not working well and fled. When some men chased them, they hurriedly looked for a place to hide in the darkening evening and moved into a bunch of plants growing against a stone wall. Unfortunately, the plants were nettles. They were terribly stung and their faces were swollen.

Thundro was a proletariat and was appointed vanguard, but never beat the targeted people. Paldan Trashi from Lungpu, on the other hand, turned from a quiet person into a ruthless activist. One time, his father-in-law asked me, "Did my son-in-law beat anyone?"

I said, "Yes. He is the worst of all."

His father-in-law said, "Oh? Why? He shouldn't be like that," but he never dared try to stop him from torturing others.

Ache was forced to confess secret military information from India. A marmot hunter, nicknamed Little Boy shouted, "How many times did you go to India?"

"Twice."

"Did you have a phone? How many?"

"Two."

"Where are they?"

"I buried one under my niece's bed and hid the other under a shrub."

They took him to the place dug and found nothing

In fact, Ache had been to Lhasa for trade but had never been to India.

To punish giving false information, Trashi Chozang hung Ache from the ceiling with a rope tied around his thumbs and then put a log on Ache's shoulder, adding weight. Ache moaned in agony.

Whatever they asked, Ache had an answer. The only problem was that his answers led them nowhere. It only fueled activists anger and increased his suffering.

Ache said, "India sent two men - Commander Li and I. Commander Li collects military information and I spy on ordinary people."

Some realized that Ache had been driven insane by the torture. Commander Li was the highest ranking man in the prefecture.

One time they asked him the same questions when the commune party secretary, Drolkar, came to check on what progress had been made during the interrogation. Ache looked at her and said, "Sister, I gave you a phone. Don't you remember?"

Everyone was speechless.

Ache had been the manager of Dondrubling Monastery's warehouse and his interrogators assumed that he must know where the monastery's treasures had been hidden. When he was asked, he said, "I know where it is."

"How much treasure? Enough for a horse cart load?"

"More than one horse cart - two horse carts."

Two horse carts were found. Each cart was pulled by three horses. Ten people sat in each cart and headed to Dondrubling Monastery. Ache pointed here and there. Twenty people dug the whole morning as directed, but found nothing.

This fruitless work fueled the activists' anger. When they returned to the commune center they dragged Ache out of the cart.

Nyigo, a village butcher, was also a vanguard. He grabbed Ache's hair and dragged him here and there. Nyigo was so strong that Ache's hair was torn out, leaving Ache bald with only a few tufts of hair sticking out of pink flesh.

Little Boy shouted, "Go inside! Bad guy with a polluted mind and evil thoughts! You made twenty people work all morning for nothing." He then punched Ache's temple with his left fist. Ache lost consciousness. Little Boy kicked Ache's back and belly with his winter military boots. They then hung him from the ceiling again with his feet barely touching the ground. He was forced to stand on tiptoe to support his body weight.

The next day, a military command came to the commune by jeep. He looked at Ache and said, "We must combine suppression with leniency. The important thing is to change the subject's mind through reeducation, but not through torture. Let him go home for a month to recover. Do not let him kill himself. We need three people to watch him."

I was one of three who watched Ache, who could not walk without support. His neck could not even support his head. His head stayed down with his chin resting on his chest. His room was cold and he preferred to sit outside under the winter sun. We took him outside and took off his clothes as he asked. His body was covered with bruises. He said, "Little Boy's boots hit my liver very hard. Trashi Chozang's idea about hanging someone from the ceiling is a really painful way of dealing with a person. I want to learn this method from Trashi Chozang." He continued, "Nyigod's got the strongest hands."

He said that Little Boy's military boots had injured his liver. His situation got worsened and he repeated nonsense for two weeks until he stopped breathing. Ache died in his bed at the age of fifty-five. It was the winter of 1965.

The policy of combining punishment with leniency was the Chairman's thought and was thus the highest level of instruction. It came too late for Ache, but it saved Kunga Zangpo, who'd been locked in a room for five days with no heating. His family sent him food during his detention. Kunga Zangpo was very worried about his situation. He was well aware of Ache's misery. As Little Boy said,

"We have a yak to butcher." Kunga Zangpo's nickname was "Yak" because his rough hair resembled yak hair.

The stupas in Norbuling Village were destroyed by the Red Guards as well as by ordinary people, who were ordered to do so. In the process of removing the stupas, they dug out old religious texts, Buddha images, broken swords, grain, and bricks of tea. No one knew how old the tea breaks were, but it was sure that they were as old as the stupas. A common saying goes, "The older the tea, the better the taste." These activists maintained an energetic mood throughout the many cold winter nights, drinking and urinating, as they interrogated and tortured their victims.

During the five days of interrogation, I had to watch the gate in the cold of night. I was tired and sleepy. But the activists never seemed to get tired. They were always energetic and seemed to enjoy torturing class enemies. There was no payment and no free food during these five days. We ate at home and then came to the commune center.

Ngodrub and Dawa were brothers and both were targeted. When interrogators asked, "What did you do?" the brothers responded in angry tones, "Yes. I owned land and property. So what?" which rendered the interrogators speechless.

Lugu was one of few men who survived imprisonment and then returned home. However, he was then targeted for class struggle. He had been a rich man, but his last business trip to Lhasa had gone poorly and he had lost a lot of money. He was eloquent and confessed that he was rich and had accumulated wealth through exploiting the proletarian class and so on and so forth. He also could speak some Chinese that he had learned while in prison. Most activists were poor men like marmot hunters and butchers. Some understood little of Lugu's statements and at times did not know how to respond.

Drongme's wife was childless. They had the biggest house in the village. Drongme was arrested with Lugu in the summer of 1958. He never returned home. Chinese soldiers and Tibetan policemen made her house their stronghold when rebels besieged the village. Some days later, her husband was arrested. She was also there in the house. She gave no food to soldiers and policemen during the siege. She chewed dried sheep lung rather than letting others see her food

store. Finally, the activist Tsechu Gonpo searched, found her food, and gave some to soldiers and policemen. Tsechu Gonpo and 'Big Mouth' complained that she was stingy and she was targeted for class struggle.

Kalzung Tsering, an activist, punched her nose. Blood streamed from her lips and chin, dripping onto the front of her shirt. Kalzung Tsering shouted, "Clean it!" but she ignored him.

Tadrin, the blacksmith, was also a target. He was nervous and cowardly and confessed whatever he thought would help him in a sobbing voice.

One time, Trashi Chozang reported the theft of a yak. Actually, he had participated in killing and eating the yak. When the theft got the attention of commune leaders, Trashi Chozang said that killing the yak was Trashi Jikme's mother idea. She was then targeted and blamed for the shameful crime of stealing public property. When policemen were escorting her to prison, an activist chased her and punched her head and back, yelling, "This thief should be thrown in jail!"

### Sentence Assembly Meeting

I heard that when Liu Shaoqi<sup>62</sup> was China's leader, his policies allowed households to have private livestock and a piece of land that allowed families to produce enough food to sustain their lives, free from starvation. The local prefecture Party secretary, Comrade Li, said that one day he had passed an emaciated young woman sitting by the roadside in downtown Dondrubling. When he returned, she was dead. Thinking current policies were not helping the masses, he decided to divide some of the communal livestock among households. Comrade Li might have copied Chairman Liu's policy. However, when Chairman Liu was later labeled a traitor and counterrevolutionary, Comrade Li was labeled a 'big traitor'.

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<sup>62</sup> Liu Shaoqi (1898-1969) implemented new economic policies while he was China's president from 1959 to 1968. Liu angered Mao during the Cultural Revolution and vanished from public life in 1968. He was labelled a traitor to the Revolution. Deng Xiaoping's government later rehabilitated him.



Red Guards and members of the 818 Faction<sup>63</sup> organized a rally to struggle against counterrevolutionaries, traitors, and religious people. Comrade Li was identified as a traitor and a board with red Chinese characters was hung around his neck. Two Red Guards held his arms behind his back, clutched his hair, and pushed his head down. Red Guards and 818 Faction members took the so-called bad elements from village to village for the people to struggle against in public. Red Guards and 818 Faction members were young. The 818 Faction was backed by the military.

A woman from Dondrubling, a revolutionary activist, accused Li of being an element of the bourgeoisie: "You separated public property and established private property. You counterrevolutionary! Down with bourgeoisie Li!" which was echoed by other audience members.

When Li was brought to Patang for a public struggle meeting, a local herder approached Li after the meeting, gave him some yogurt, and said, "You are our benefactor. You gave us life."

Norbu, a village farmer, gave Li a bowl of hot milk after the public meeting in their village. Li remembered Norbu and some years later, when he was prefecture governor, took his army coat from his back, gave it to Norbu, and said, "Thank you for that milk." People thought Li was a sensible man.

Trashi Tsering became a member of the CPPCC.<sup>64</sup> The Nangchen King, and prominent local *rinpoche* were also listed as CPPCC members. They were paid by the government and had enough food for their families, even during the starving times. I went around the gates to their homes, hoping for something to eat. Trashi Tsering always chased me away with stones and shouted, "Get away! Thief!" Indeed, he was right. Given the chance, I would have stolen something. On the other hand, Gonsarchoje Rinpoche was nice and often gave me leftover food.

Members of the CPPCC did not have lives as smooth as they had hoped. The dissolution of the CPPCC meant its members lost

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<sup>63</sup> 818 Faction = a Red Guard faction.

<sup>64</sup> Chinese People's Political Consultative Committee.

their advantage and their secular or religious affiliations were then linked to the oppression and exploitation of the masses.

One rainy summer day, all Norbuling Villagers were called to Dondrubling for a conviction assembly. Students, government workers, farmers, and herders gathered downtown. Soldiers stood in a line, holding machine guns, facing the crowd, preventing the crowd from pushing inside. Policemen clad in white coats and blue pants were arranged in another, smaller circle. All had holstered pistols attached to leather belts around their waists. Snipers were positioned in perfect offensive postures atop surrounding buildings. It seemed as if they were expecting a battle.

Leaders sat on a long bench in the center of the two circles. Some held umbrellas or wore raincoats. A senior Chinese officer announced the start of the assembly. Prisoners dressed in uniforms and hats were lined up in a row with boards hanging around their necks, their names and crimes clearly written in Chinese. When an officer called a name, two Red Guards escorted the prisoner to the center. The speaker then announced their crimes and sentence.

Trashhi Tsering was escorted to the center and was charged with being a henchman of the Drawu Chief. He was sentenced to live in Atro Village, a remote community in a Yangtze River gorge.

A few minutes later, Gonsarchoje Rinpoche was called. His back had been broken. Unable to walk, two Red Guards dragged him through the mud to the center. One of those Red Guards was Trashhi Jikme. He was from my village and also a member of the 818 Faction.

One time at a public meeting, Jigme Trashhi said, "Old people, including my mother, still believe in superstition. Her lips murmur as she milks. She says 'My dear son, I wish you to live for a hundred years,' when I leave home."

People repeated his criticism of his mother and laughed at him. He then got the nickname "Lip Murmurer."

The other Red Guard was Leyu from Norbuling Village, who also was a member of the 818 Faction. Leyu was very revolutionary and was on constant lookout for old ladies who dared chant or circumambulate. Gonsarchoje Rinpoche was sentenced to twenty years in prison. Padma Trulku was called and his sentence was the same as Gonsarchoje's. I did not know the names of the other

prisoners and I don't remember their sentences, which were more or less the same as Gonsarchoje's and Trashi Tsering's.

Finally, two soldiers escorted the worst criminal, Sherab Lodru, to the center of the gathering. This murderer from Zurmang wore only a thin shirt and thin underwear. He was barefoot. An officer announced his crime and sentenced him to death. Two soldiers pushed him toward a meadow near the river. A few steps later, he could no longer walk and was dragged. Two shots "Bang! Bang!" sounded. The crowd asked to see his body. He lay on his belly. His hands and ankles were swollen and bound with rope. The bullets had entered the back of his head. Dark blood mixed with brains oozed out on the muddy meadow as he lay twitching. Later, lama prisoners came, rolled him in a big yak hair sheet, hung it on a pole, and carried him to a sky burial ground.

### Displacement

Those labeled as landowners, henchmen, or religious practitioners, were banished to remote villages. Many families from Norbuling and Dondrubling were sent to smaller villages in the Yangtze River Valley. The number was not enough to fill these empty villages so volunteers were encouraged to move there. Some were motivated by revolutionary ideas and volunteered. Production team members worked to build house for these volunteers.

We built many houses for these new residents, which was relatively easy work. In contrast, plowing fields that had been abandoned for years was very hard for men and the plow yaks. When I pushed down on the plow, the yaks stopped and could only move forward with great effort. If I let up on the plow, the furrows were so shallow that the plowing had to be done again. Blisters on my fingers and palms met, burst, and turned to callouses. Some plow yaks died from exhaustion.

Our hard work paid off. Smoke rose from chimneys, people fetched water from streams, and animals grazed near villages signaling that life had returned to the ghost villages.

I heard from my cousin that ghosts had lived in these villages after they were abandoned. He had heard mysterious whistles from all directions late at night in deserted villages.

### Becoming a Butcher

Later, one of Father's cousins told me to go to Rashul - a pure herding area - where I lived with Uncle for ten years. I was assigned to a production team there. All the work was related to herding, slaughtering livestock, hunting wildlife, and collecting herbs.

Fall was 'harvest' time for herders. Livestock were required taxes. Each production team had to provide hundreds of sheep and yaks to the State. Slaughtering animal was also necessary. Locals traditionally kill animals by suffocation. This method was replaced with the requirement that the animals had to have their throats cut. A Chinese officer checked every slaughtered sheep's neck to ensure this had been done. I cut a few sheep's throats this way. Killing many was hard to accept. All village men had to participate in the sheep slaughter. Refusal to participate meant being accused of being under the influence of religion. Each man had twenty sheep to kill. I was reluctant to cut a sheep's throat. It was bloody, smelly, and cruel. I thought strangling was less bloody and more humane. I looped a rope around each sheep's neck and tied one rope end to a peg in the ground and pulled the other end as hard as I could. The sheep struggled to escape, sticking out its tongue, struggling to breathe, and finally falling down motionless. I then cut the dead sheep's neck to suggest this was how it had died. Our supervisors were unaware of how we really killed the sheep.

Killing was men's work. Women were responsible for cutting up the carcasses. The meat and skins were transported by truck to Dondrubling and Ziling. The heads, feet, and internal organs were left for locals. The commune collected the heads and fairly divided them among members.

Dogs barked and ravens crowed as they struggled for the remains of the carcasses. Squawking, startled ravens swooped into the air when dogs attacked them. This slaughtering of animals continued

each year until a State slaughterhouse was built at the Norbuling Mani Pile. Many *mani* stones were used in the construction.

In 1983, the national policy for fixing farm output quotas for each household took place. I returned to my village with my share of livestock - several yaks. I married a woman from Dondrubling and established my own farm in the upper part of Lungpu Village. We had one son, and then two daughters. This seemingly happy life did not last long as my wife died a year later, leaving three children behind. I sold my livestock and moved to Norbuling Village and worked as a part time stone mason. I sent my two daughters to school and finally they got government jobs. In recent years, I sold some of my farm land at a good price, built rooms, and collect rent. I travel with my son to various places every year.

# RINAM

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Rinam (b. 1937) from a herding community in Drito County, experienced an impoverished life after his mother donated their property to a lama as a post-death funeral activity after his father's death. He was a servant for monks in Gonsar Monastery, worked as barley transporter for the PLA, and became a production team leader. He married Chokar, Lhakpa Wangmo's cousin.

## Trade Between Herders and Farmers

Several households from Norbuling Village formed a caravan that had thirty to forty yaks loaded with tea bricks, brown sugar, crystal sugar, bowls, leather, woven sashes and bags, and so on.

Herders could get what they needed from traders, who greeted their herder friends with, "How is your family?" If the answer was positive, it meant they would not have a good income for carving *mani* stones. They also asked about other families while visiting homes. When they heard somebody had died in a home, it meant they would have a profitable visit. Herders in Drito jokingly said, "Norbuling people look forward to deaths in their friends' homes."

Traders packed twelve tea bricks into a leather box and gave it to their significant friends. The amount of what was given depended on what they expected in return. Pastoral products - meat, butter, yogurt, and so on - would be returned later. Oral contracts were agreed up as to the amount of trade for the upcoming autumn. Norbuling farmers said, "Please come to Norbuling after autumn for barley and *mani*."

Prices fluctuated with harvest yields. If it was a good year, barley was cheaper. Generally, one *gyama*<sup>65</sup> of barley equaled one

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<sup>65</sup> One *gyama*= 0.5 kilogram.

*gyama* of meat. Two or three *gyama* of barley traded for one *gyama* of butter.

Geru of Norbuling Village was a good trader and operated a caravan of fifty yaks. He visited Drito three times a year and inquired about local families to better obtain orders for *mani* stones. Finding barley and meat trading opportunities, he became wealthier over time. The dozens of sheep, goats, and yaks he traded for in herding areas were driven back to the farming village where his hired butchers slaughtered them. The meat was then transported to farming villages along the Yangtze River Valley and traded for barley. The barley was brought to Norbuling Village where his herder friends collected it.

Geru's trade grew from *mani* stones, barley, and meat to various handicrafts for a monastery in Drito. When he received orders for religious objects, he engaged metal smiths and took the finished items to the monastery.

Geru had no farmland, but his trading skills between farming and herding areas made him rich, which brought misfortune during the Cultural Revolution. Although he was not charged with being in the landlord class, he was labeled 'religious'. Meanwhile, Norbuling Villagers believed that Geru would surely go to Hell because he had slaughtered so many livestock.

There were other good traders in the Drito area. The Gyayang Chief governed six tribes. Tsering Phuntsok was one of the tribal leaders, organized a caravan of sixty loads of wool, and crossed the Kunlun Mountains to Gormo after fall harvest. His caravan mainly sold wool and brought back barley from Gormo, which was regarded as the best quality. It was bigger and brighter in color than barley from farming areas along the Yangtze River Valley. The biggest challenge of the wool-barley trade was rain, which soaked the wool and made it heavy.

Tsering Phuntsok was a respected leader who did not collect taxes from families who could barely afford it, but enforced double punishment to those who dodged taxes.

In contrast, another chief, Paltse, was a lazy, stingy man who often lay in bed constantly scratching his back and checking for lice. When his wife offered food to guests, he signaled her to not offer too much. Paltse was incapable of making a living through trading.

Farm girls and women had excellent skills in spinning and weaving woolen materials. Their best woolen cloth could hardly be distinguished from machine-made woolen cloth from India. One hundred woolen threads were in a bundle, which cost a coin or six *gyama* of barley. Thread was necessary to repair shoes, clothes, bags, and tents. A hard working man always carried thread and needles, and was thus equipped to fix whatever needed repair.

Good shoes sold for thirty coins. Rich people made boots from leather, which was also used to decorate woolen bag-bottom corners and yak-hair tent corners. Some monks wore leather sandals.

Twenty-five *mani* stones were carved for a sheep and fifty *mani* were carved for a yak. *Dongkar* was a unit of fifty stones. A *dorong* was 2,500 stones. *Mani* stones were often counted in *dorong*. One *mani* stone cost one coin. A person only carved two or three *mani* stones a day to ensure the guaranteed quality.

### Cloth in the Drito Area

Goatskin and yak-calf skin robes were regarded as inferior quality and worn only by poor people. However, such robes were practical, light, and durable. I had one calfskin robe. The calf death rate was high in spring, resulting in many calf skins, which were used to make robes and bed mats. Many dead calves were abandoned on piles of dung ash near tents and monasteries and then chewed on by wild dogs.

The skins of sheep slaughtered in September were best for making robes. Such skins had short hair, were light, looked nice, and indicated their owner's wealth. A man who wore a new sheepskin robe, washed his hair, and wore new red tassels in his hair was admired by men and was attractive to women.

My family originated in the Amdo area of Nakchu and came to Drito two generations ago. My relatives completely lost their original dialect. Local people called our family Amdo, which became our surname. My uncle was rich.

People made *tsampa* in the front of their robe rather than using bowls. When serving guests, they made *tsampa* in a big bowl. After the *tsampa* and dried cheese were added to a bowl with hot tea and melted butter, it was stirred with the right hand, but the bowl was too



full to stir. The host then put everything in their lap and mixed with both hands. The lap part of the robe was soft and lighter in color than the rest of the robe – this was from making *tsampa*. Guests from farming areas were disgusted by such *tsampa*, but did not want to humiliate their host and reluctantly ate it.

Many herders could barely afford *tsampa* in their daily diet. Cheese mixed with butter was eaten as a *tsampa* substitute with, perhaps, a bit of *tsampa* added for flavor.

Meat was available in everyday meals regardless of family wealth. Cold weather and a dry climate preserved meat in good condition from winter to summer. Dried meat was the main source of meat in summer. Some families slaughtered seven to eight yaks just for dried meat.

### Mother Gives Our Property to a Lama After Father's Death

Father's death from illness when I was four years old changed our lives completely. Mother's hopes and desires for life dimmed with Father's death. She had no interest in continuing a herding life and remembered Father only in positive ways - responsible, humorous, and generous. He had been perfect, she believed, and wondered why this had not been clearer to her when he was alive. These memories of Father's perfection made her sorrowful and depressed that she seemed unable to escape from. She felt that nobody could compare with Father and nothing was more important than him. If there was anything that could help Father's soul, Mother was ready to do it.

Later, when a lama from Gegye happened to visit our community, Mother gave him 140 yaks, seven horses, Father's rifle, a yak hair tent with all the furnishings, two of her five amber hair decorations, and our pastureland. This was nearly everything we possessed. Mother only kept three amber decorations to start a new life. She then took me and my two brothers to Gonsar Monastery, which was located in a v-shaped valley where juniper trees covered south-facing slopes and shrubs grew on the other side. The monastery had 500 monks and a large farming area. Half of the farmland was on the other side of Yangtze River.

There were two types of monks. One category was made up of respected, venerable monks whose responsibility was religious practice. The other group was made up of working monks who were engaged in plowing, harvesting, and threshing. The working monks were divided into three teams. Each team had their own threshing yard and farmland. One team's land was located along the north bank of the Yangtze. Monks used yak-skin boats to cross there to work. The competition between teams was not only to see who finished the work first, but also provided entertaining performances such as dancing, wrestling, singing, running, and joking. Monks' entertainment activities sometimes lasted until late evening and attracted villagers.

Mother bought an empty, one-room bungalow with her amber decorations. My brothers and I cut juniper branches to make a simple bed. My maternal uncle, who was a monk at this monastery, gave us three female yaks and told Mother not to sell them. Oldest Brother quickly learned to be a carpenter and used his skills to make a door and bed from juniper boards for us.

### I Work for the Monastery

We fetched water, collected yak dung, swept the courtyards, and did other daily tasks for the monastery. In return, we received such basic necessities as *tsampa* and meat. My childhood was spent at that monastery where I learned how to sew and helped the monks repair worn out shoe soles.

Mother later married a man with five sworn brothers who had no property. They were all bandits. Stepfather's thievery was a way of life. He told me that sometimes, under cover of darkness, he snuck up to a tent and put out his bowl when the family was serving dinner. The housewife often did not notice or object to the additional bowl and filled it with hot soup and meat. After dinner, the family chatted and then went to bed. He then stole a bag that might have contained most anything and left from under the tent.

At times, he and his sworn brothers slaughtered a yak when their shoe soles were worn out and they needed leather to repair them. Finally realizing that this life had a dim future, Stepfather wanted to

become a normal man. He met Mother and lived with us. Mother then had another son, my youngest brother.

When I was fourteen, I was chosen to join a team the monastery organized to travel westward. This was the so-called Tsongchu area<sup>66</sup> located in the upper-most part of the Yangtze River. Local herders had many hunting dogs and used stone traps to kill marmots. A heavy rock was put above a marmot's burrow, supported by a stone pole. When the marmot touched the small stone pole, it triggered the big rock, which fell on its head. If it was not killed, it would surely die later or be killed by the hunter beating its head with a stick.

Marmot hunting was generally denigrated, but it was common in this area. Even the local chief actively hunted marmots. This area was very remote and without monasteries. Consequently, religious practice was less intense than in valley areas.

Locals also hunted wild donkeys, antelopes, deer, and wild yaks. Hunting wild yaks required bravery, experience, and a good rifle. It was dangerous to hunt wild yaks. A wounded, fully grown wild yak was unstoppable. A skilled hunter needed a safe place, such as atop a boulder or in a burrow big enough to accommodate him if the yak charged.

The monastery delegation conducted rituals and in return, locals offered livestock, meat, cheese, and butter. The main purpose of this annual visit was to receive offerings from locals.

I heard that there was conflict in most areas as Chinese soldiers poured in. The adults in our group discussed escaping or surrendering. A senior monk said, "There's no way to escape. Communists cover the sky. Wherever we go, we cannot leave their shadow. I know Yi Buga. He is a government officer. It is better to surrender through him."

When Yi Buga came to the Tsongchu area with a group of government people, we found him and presented a *darker*. Yi Buga said, "Very good. We will give you a stamped paper. If soldiers stop you, show them this paper."

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<sup>66</sup> In contemporary Drakar and Zokya townships in Drito County.

We thanked him and travelled eastward. We encountered many refugees grouped by families, villages, and tribes with their livestock. We were eager for news and asked what was happening in our home place. Many people we met knew no more than the little we knew.

One day we dismounted and waited when we saw a group of soldiers marching toward us. My throbbing heart was almost visible in my chest as I imagined the worst. A leader shouted to their translator to ask us who we were and if we had weapons.

We said that we had no weapons and showed them the paper. The leader looked at it, murmured, and then the translator said, "Go to the county seat and show this paper if anyone stops you on the way." They then continued marching to the west while we went eastward.

We saw more soldiers on horses and on foot. Their uniform camouflaged them, making them indistinguishable from the autumn grassland, deceiving everyone, as though they were ghosts. The paper worked perfectly. All marching groups did not trouble us and we eventually reached the seat of Drito County.

### Wrongly Sent to a Concentration Camp

There was a large concentration of people near the county seat in an area that formerly had been a place for caravans to camp. Soldiers holding guns to their chests surrounded the area. We obediently looked for someone to give our paper to and formally surrender. Someone told us to join the big group. Captivity was safer than wandering in wild areas and we thought we were finally safe and no longer needed to worry about external dangers.

Newcomers regularly joined this giant, crowded camp, reminding me of a summer horse race gathering, but without horses at the camp center.

Life is fragile. A life is precious, but worth no more than the physical body. A few coughs could lead to a fatal disease in days. Human corpses were regularly dragged to a pit for mass burial.

People could freely walk inside the camp after endless public meetings. However, attempts at escape proved that the guns in the firm hands of soldiers were not just for show. Instead, they were

manifestations of power to tame the masses. When the corpses of soldiers were brought from a combat area, we could see anger and hatred churning in the young guards' eyes. Gripping fully loaded machine guns, their hostile eyes swept the captives' faces. Many of us kept our heads down, as though avoiding stones that might poke through our soles.

Every day, meetings called *xuexi lobjong* were held. *Xuexi* is Chinese and *lobjong* is Tibetan. Both mean exactly the same thing. The two words together mean 'study study'. I learned nothing from 'study study' and I paid no attention. We freely walked about the camp and met our acquaintances.

### Transporting Barley for the Chinese

I met an acquaintance who was a government worker, with the title *juzhang* 'bureau director'. He was surprised to see me and said, "Why are you here? Do you know what this place is?"

I said, "I don't know. We got a paper from Yi Buga and then surrendered here."

He said, "This place is for bad people. They are all going downslope. Do you know where they will be sent?" He then answered his own question: "They will be sent to a labor camp. Really bad people will be sent to Ziling. You are poor people with no property. You should not be here. I'll help you get out of here."

I said, "I'm with a group of people. Can they also be set free?"

He said, "It's difficult to set all of you free. If some of you are from very poor families and were servants, I can help."

I introduced all of our group to my acquaintance. He selected those with a 'clean' background and took us to a tent where a senior Chinese officer was sitting in a chair. The officer said, "I have a job for you. I want you to take sixty male yaks and bring back barley along the Yangtze River. You have a clean background and it is great opportunity to serve the people and our country."

The distance from Drito to Dondrubling was around 200 kilometers. A roundtrip took a week.<sup>67</sup> Five of us worked transporting barley between Dondrubling and Drito for almost two years, which was the period of the only great starvation time Tibet ever experienced. We were given dried mushrooms as provisions, which we boiled, with salt and meat. None of us liked the mushrooms so we discarded them by the roadside.

We saw yaks and sheep grazing untended in various places. No herders or black tents were in sight. Herders had been forced into concentration camps and collective farms, and were forbidden to live in remote areas. These ownerless livestock attracted us. We chased them and killed one each time we saw some.

Dondrubling was almost empty. Even the sky and trees were without sparrows because they had been targeted for extermination. The Great Leader believed sparrows ate grain, which led to a movement to empty sparrow nests and kill sparrows. Some people killed sparrows for food. Some survived and escaped to mountains and rocks, fleeing the eradication of their species.

Occasionally, I saw skeletal children scavenging for food in piles of garbage outside military camps and the place where we loaded barley.

During the starving times, we had more than enough meat to eat, but only meat did not satisfy our appetites. We opened some barley bags we were transporting and cooked some. When we delivered the barley, we honestly reported this to the Chinese officer. He said, "It's fine for you to eat barley, but you must not give barley to others." He weighed all the bags, determined that the missing amount was what we had reported, and said, "All of you have worked hard. You should eat whatever you need, but never give barley to others."

We promised to obey him and thanked him. A Chinese man who spoke fluent Tibetan was assigned to our team.

One day, we camped near the river downhill of Dondrubling Monastery. An old woman using a walking stick slowly made her

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<sup>67</sup> The distance between Drito to Dondrubling was 200 kilometers in 2015, a much shorter distance than when caravans used a shortcut.

way to our camp and asked for food. When I asked her where her home was, she told me she was from Norbuling and described her home and family. I knew her family and had stayed in her home when I went to Norbuling. She was only middle-aged but seemed so much older that I didn't recognize her.

I gave her a whole yak leg, which so surprised her that she took a few steps back as if she were about to faint and then fervent tears dribbled down her dusty face. The yak leg was heavy so I tied it to her back. She walked a few steps and then rested. I watched her until she disappeared from sight.

Another time, two boys came asking for food. When I asked where they were from, they said they were from Norbuling. We gave them barley and white flour. They thanked us and left.

The next day, I heard someone shouting, "Thief!" It was the woman I had given the yak leg to. We came out of our tent and saw the same two boys stealing grain. Their trousers were so stuffed with grain that they could barely walk. We caught them and emptied their trousers.

I scolded, "Shameless! How dare you steal from someone who helped you."

Tsongtra, my colleague, beat them until I stopped him. Our team leader, a Chinese man said, "They are social rats. We should send them to a labor camp to reform their behavior."

The boys' legs shook when they heard this. They begged not to be sent to jail. The Chinese man indicated he would not compromise. I felt empathy for these boys and begged him to relent but he would not listen. I then yelled at the boys while pointing my finger at the Chinese man, "If I see you again, I promise to send you to jail. Apologize!"

The boys immediately kowtowed to the Chinese man.

I then shouted, "Get out of here now!" They left immediately and kowtowed to us from a distance to thank us again for not sending them to jail. The Chinese man scolded me for spoiling bad people. I kept silent.

We sometimes traveled through villages along the Yangtze to collect barley, which stored in a Bumchu Monastery hall. A young Chinese man was the storeroom keeper, and slept in the monastery

hall. When I asked him if he was interested in trading meat for barley, he told me to come at midnight with meat. At the appointed time, I brought a big chunk of meat to the monastery hall and he told me to fill a bag with barley. In this way I could give barley to Mother and some of my friends.

Many villagers were starving. It was hard to know people's age. They looked like skeletons covered with skin. Skinny children had visible rib cages and big, protruding bellies.

Animals also suffered. Our pack yaks had no time to recover from hauling their heavy loads. The barley bags injured their backs, and pus and blood oozed from their broken, rotting skin. The odor of their festering flesh attracted flies that laid eggs. The stink wafted about in the breeze, as though we were transporting rotten garbage. Our yaks died one after another until we had no yaks left, thus ending our work.

Many refugees lost their family members in chaotic conflict in the west of Drito County. Many women and children ended up in communes near Drito after their men were killed in battle or left them behind.

I met a woman in her early fifties in the concentration camp. Originally from Lungda Village near Norbuling, she and her son had been separated in a sudden encounter with some Chinese. She had no idea of her son's whereabouts. Her daughter was with her two younger sisters in Dakok Commune in the north of Drito County.

A commune leader accused her of being hostile to the commune system, which resulted in her arrest, although she believed that she was innocent. After I gave her a handful of roasted barley, she told me her story in between pitiful sobs. She was so weak that she could hardly speak without resting ever so often. She asked me to locate her daughter. This poor woman never had a chance to meet her daughter and sisters. Her health condition worsened and she died a few days later.

I noticed that her younger sister, Chimé Wangmo had also been sent to the same concentration camp for discussing escaping from the commune. Chimé Wangmo searched for her older sister and was told she had died.



One day, I returned from transporting barley and went to Dakok Commune looking for the daughter of the dead women. I found the dead woman's group and told them the bad news. The news did not affect the dead woman's sister who was already half crazy because her four-year-old son had died from diarrhea a few days earlier. A young woman about my age burst into tears and cried and I realized that she was the dead woman's daughter. I comforted her and encouraged her not to cry. This emotional occasion made me experience sadness mingled with compassion.

This young woman, Chokar, had small eyes and a high nose. She was not attractive in a general sense, but there was something about her that intrigued me. Chokar and her cousin asked me about their home village because they knew that I was transporting barley from the valleys. They wanted to return to their original village.

I told them about the terrible starving and said, "Don't consider returning home now." Chokar gave me some small wild yams mixed with yogurt in a small sheep stomach bag and asked me to visit her the next time I returned from my travels.

I did visit again. My real reason was to see Chokar, whom I slowly fell in love with. Chokar's aunt, the only one of three aunts who had been not jailed, was accused of being hostile to the commune system and had almost collapsed. She seriously considered suicide, but could not carry it out because she knew her twelve-year-old daughter would be an orphan. Fortunately, the Tibetan woman who had charged many others was replaced by a woman who believed that there was nobody to accuse, since all the commune members were women and children from ordinary villages.

In 1962, women in the commune asked the commune leader to send them home. Their request was approved. Chokar faced a difficult decision. If she left with her aunt and other village women, we could not see each other. She asked me to go with her, but I dared not mention her request to Mother. I was afraid she would not agree that I live far away in a village with a farm girl. Chokar understood my reluctance and did not insist. I suggested it was better if she stayed here, since the food supply in her home village was uncertain. Chokar accepted this undeniable fact and stayed with me. The sadness and

homesickness in her watery eyes told me how much she missed her home. I inwardly vowed that one day I would fulfill her request.

We lived together in the commune. A year later, we had a daughter and, in the next two years, she delivered two sons. There was one year difference between each of our three children who grew up and played together.

### Stepfather is Released From Jail in 1970

Many ordinary herders were arrested and sent to labor camps, including Stepfather who, as I've already mentioned, had been an incurable, merciless bandit. His notorious gang of five sworn brothers made life uneasy for lonely nomad households in rural valleys. Their poor victims could only curse them. As he became a fully grown adult, he saw that there was no future in such a risky life, stopped his thievery, and married Mother. He became a different person - a normal family man - although his evil deeds were always in his victims' memories.

On judgment day, he was sentenced to life in prison and sent to a labor camp near Ziling. Serving more or less time in labor camp was the inevitable destiny for most men and women, but only a few received life sentences. Youngest Brother missed Father and often asked about him. Mother knew what stories to tell to placate him.

We hardly recognized Father when he was released in 1970 and came home. Wearing a ragged Chinese-style suit, his gaunt body resembled a skeleton and he was unable to walk without assistance. It was a miracle that he made it home in such weak physical condition. Our friends and acquaintances visited, greeting, chatting, sobbing, and laughing. A local doctor told us to give Father small amounts of food, and increase the amount day by day. He explained that nutritious food might be fatal for someone who had been malnourished for a long period. Within a few days, Father gained strength and color came to his face and told us about his experiences:

We were forced into the back of a truck. Rope nets above the truck bed prevented escape. Four soldiers holding guns watched us. Defiant and weak from a long period of imprisonment, many prisoners chose death.

Soldiers dragged them out of the truck after they broke rules and executed them by the roadside. We had little water to drink and many men died in about a week. Less than half of us in the truck reached the destination alive.

The prison was a place that tested human nature. If someone was good in prison, he was deemed a good person forever. Some people reported anything to prison supervisors to get even tiny benefits. Human nature was totally exposed and undisguised. Adults often behaved like children. It was easy to read their minds and behavior. Most of my cellmates could not wait to breathe free air and died with tiny tears wetting the corner of their eyes.

Monks and laymen were different. Laymen were vulnerable since they were concerned about their children and other family members. Many monks and lamas had been trained and engaged in spiritual practice in their cells. They also retained a sense of humor, even in such a hellish environment.

Lama Sanggye Tendzin from Nangchen was my cellmate. His compassion and honesty made me his friend and, clandestinely, his devotee. Repairing prisoners' shoes that all looked the same was his duty. Even the shoe owners could not distinguish their own shoes very well. Lama Sanggye Tendzin prepared many pairs of numbers. One was given to the shoe owner and one was left inside the shoes so that he could easily identify the shoes' owner.

Though he repaired dozens of shoes daily, he never stopped religious practice. He meditated, but no one noticed or could tell the difference between his meditating and sleeping. Without prayer beads, he felt something was missing. Noticing an electrical cord hanging from the ceiling, he removed the metal core, cut the rubber covering into 108 pieces, and connected these pieces with thread to make prayer beads.

When he cut the wire with his shoe-repair pliers, the electricity shocked him. He said, "Ah, that is karma for stealing," and vowed to never steal again.

Sanggye Tendzin was released from jail along with Stepfather. Two years later, Stepfather died. His last request was to ask Sanggye Tendzin to officiate at his funeral. We did so and secretly performed

religious rituals. Not long after Stepfather's death, Mother also died and Sanggye Tendzin came again and chanted for her.

I had fewer people to worry about after my parents' death and decided to move to my wife's village. The commune gave us yaks and sheep. We packed everything and moved to her village in the spring of 1973, as I had promised. Our trip to her village took four days. Her home was occupied by one of her relatives, who moved to Lungpu Village a few days later.

We were welcomed by villagers and relatives, and I was soon promoted to the position of commune leader. My task was to announce work and rest times, and list daily work tasks. I became good friends with local men.

### Hunting Musk Deer and an Explosion in the Village

Musk deer glands brought good money. Finding musk deer was not difficult, since they lived near the village. Samten, the Party leader of Norbuling Village and Dawa, the first leader of my commune, had semi-automatic rifles. Both enjoyed hunting pigeons, marmots, blue sheep, and musk deer, all of which we easily found near the village.

We three went to hunt musk deer one day and climbed a slope in front of the village. Samten saw a musk deer standing atop a vertical rock ridge and said, "You two go kill that musk deer. I'll wait for you here," and gave me his rifle.

Dawa and I slowly walked up toward the musk deer. I stopped after a few minutes and positioned myself while assessing the shooting range. It all came down to timing once the musk deer was in my sights. I had to be careful with breathing, because it affected my aim. I had only one shot because if I missed, the deer would be out of sight in an instant. I continued approaching the musk deer, rested behind a boulder, and lit a cigarette. After a few puffs, "Bang!" Dawa had pulled his trigger. The bullet tore through the deer's head, which rolled down the ridge, flipping over a few times in the process.

Dawa and I raced up and found it was male. I complimented Dawa's on his marksmanship.

Suddenly, we heard an explosion from the village as gray smoke billowed up from the threshing ground. Women were crying

and screaming. We thought someone might have been killed and worried they might be our children and wives. Leaving the dead deer, we rushed to the village and found a hail rocket had exploded. Trashi Penpa was injured, his face colored black from exploded gunpowder, and bubbles of saliva oozing from his mouth. His wife was crying his name. We carried him to a horse cart as he moaned and took him to the hospital in Dondrubling.

Trashi Penpa was responsible for preventing hailstorms that damaged the crops. He used thirty-centimeter-long paper rockets. The launcher shot dozens of rockets into black clouds moving from west to east. The rockets exploded in and under the thick clouds, diffusing small amounts of tiny gray smoke into the clouds. I also knew how to launch rockets from having served as a rocket launcher one summer. It was dangerous, but great fun. My younger son was keen on playing with the rockets, but I always chased him away.

Trashi Penpa had been preparing rockets under a hot summer sun and the heat had led to the explosion. Though several children were playing near him, including my son, only he was injured. Afterwards, no one dared put a rocket under a hot sun.

### Team Leader

Tobgyal and Adro Trawa were brothers, lived with their father and uncle, and shared a wife. This was the second family in our village in which brothers shared a wife. Villagers did not know who was the father of their children, although there was much speculation based on the facial similarity between the children and their mother's two husbands.

One of Tobgyal's arms had been somewhat disabled since he was a child. Tobgyal was in one of the two teams I assigned to transport manure to fields. He asked me if I could give him an easier task so I assigned him to be assist Ozer and Tsenam, the main horse cart drivers.

A few days later, Tobgyal said that work as an assistant brought him only a few work points and he wanted to resume his former position.

I agreed.

A few days later, he said some people in the team were reluctant to work with him because of his disabled arm, and said he wanted to work again as a horse cart assistant.

I refused and said, "You can't change your job assignment so often."

He showed his displeasure by angrily muttering. That evening, a commune meeting was held with a Chinese military officer and a Tibetan translator in attendance. After the leaders made a speech, they asked if the masses had comments and requests. Tobgyal stood up and complained about his work position and said he wanted to work as a horse cart assistant.

The Chinese leader said, "What?"

Once this was translated, I told the story behind the request. Tobgyal shouted at me and approached as if he wanted to fight. I shouted back and held a small stool in my hands as though I was going to throw it at him. People stopped me and Tobgyal.

The Chinese leader said, "It is Tobgyal's fault. He must not challenge an appointed commune leader. He must now be sent to the administrative village for a public struggle meeting and then sent to jail."

Tobgyal immediately wilted and regretted his actions. His wife cried, scolded Tobgyal for his rudeness, and begged for mercy as the Chinese leader announced that the meeting was over.

I could not sleep that night. Because of me, a person would be sent to jail and this would haunt my memory forever. I had to stop it. I regretted not compromising, and trying to meet Tobgyal's repeated requests. My brother often scolded me for indecisiveness and willingness to compromise. I was full of self-reproach. Guilty thoughts haunted me as painfully as acute stomach pain all night. I got up before daybreak, went straight to the translator's room, knocked on the door, and waited. He opened the door, rubbing his eyes, and said, "You're so early? What's the matter?"

I said, "I'm here to ask that Tobgyal not be sent to jail. I beg you!"

He said, "People like you spoil bad people! How can we control commune members if we continue to spoil bad people?"

Tobgyal deserves this punishment," and then he took me to the Chinese leader.

I said, "This is a contradiction between people, not a contradiction between ourselves and the enemy. This contradiction must be resolved among the people. I will resolve the contradiction," and then glibly recited such terminology from Chairman Mao's writings in my broken Chinese, using Tibetan grammar.

It worked. The Chinese man said, "Yes. You address this problem."

I then went to Tobgyal's home. His brother and his wife welcomed me. The wife was my wife's relative. She sobbed and begged that her younger husband not be sent to jail. Meanwhile, Adro Trawa scolded Tobgyal for being offensive.

I said, "They will hold a public struggle meeting for you in Norbuling and then hand you over to the police in Dondrubling. If you are lucky, you only need to endure the struggle meeting in Norbuling."

His wife burst into tears. Adro Trawa scolded him again for being rude and not following my orders. Tobgyal said in a quivery, gentle voice, "Uncle, I will listen to you and do whatever you arrange. I apologize for my ignorant rudeness."

I said, "Find someone to write a self-criticism letter for you and read it publicly at our commune meeting. I will then criticize your behavior. This is not me showing off, it is helping you avoid jail."

His brother said, "Yes, yes, let's do that. Please scold him. He deserves it."

Adro Trawa thanked me again and again. As I was going downstairs, his wife grabbed my hand and said, "Thank you, thank you," in Chinese as tears streamed down her face. It was probably the only Chinese she knew. She might have thought speaking Chinese was more formal and effective.

I called a commune meeting. The Chinese leader and the translator were in front, facing the crowd. Tobgyal stood before the villagers, read his letter, and then handed it to the Chinese leader.

I said, "I will watch you for three days. You will be on probation. If you make a mistake during this time, we will send you to

jail." I knew he would not make a mistake in three days. The problem was thus resolved and the meeting was adjourned.

It was not over for me, however. My wife's aunt scolded, "Supported by Chinese soldiers, you nearly sent a villager to jail. Your leader position will ruin you personally and ruin your relationship with neighbors and villagers. No one will like you in the end, except your masters. You must resign. You must resign." She repeatedly emphasized this.

I dearly respected her and treated her as my mother. She regarded me as her son and sincerely loved me. Whenever she got meat from her friends in Dondrubling, she brought it to me. She would say that I was from a herding area and missed eating meat, and often told my wife to treat me better.

I thought about everything that night. I could not refuse her request. The position was ideal for many men, since being a leader meant being exempt from heavy labor. Although I was not sure how I would perform as an ordinary worker, I took my resignation application to leaders in Norbuling. They said they hoped that I would reconsider.

Samten visited me four times, asking me to reconsider. He said that there was no suitable candidate for my replacement in our commune, but my decision was final, disappointing him.

### My Brothers' Visits

Drito had rich pastoral resources consequently, herders had plenty of animal products. Drito and Chumarleb were comparatively wealthy counties. I had three brothers and each had established his own family. My brothers visited my home in winter. They also often visited both jointly and individually, bringing large amounts of meat, butter, sausage, sheep heads, and sheepskins. The food was enough for my family members for the entire winter. Each time they visited, they brought a dozen or so sheep carcasses. I was admired for having such wealthy brothers who stayed with us for the winter. My brothers' children visited many times and became friends with the village children.



After I resigned, my math and note-taking skills could not be replaced, because nobody in our commune knew how to take even simple notes. I then worked as the commune secretary. I had learned to read Tibetan when I was at the monastery and could read simple texts out loud, although I didn't understand much of the content. I had recorded the number of bags and their weight during the time I had transported barley. I continued using these skills and also wrote letters to my brothers. I had no awareness of spelling and no sense of grammar. My notes were in my own oral language. A local scholar once could not understand my letter since he tried to understand what I wrote word by word.

My family and Aunt's family had an intimate relationship. We shared good food and happiness, and worked as a single family when the village had picnics. I also helped Aunt's family slaughter sheep and yaks for winter food. In 1985, my family moved to Norbuling, where we have lived since.

# ANAM

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Anam (b. 1932) of Norbuling Village worked for better-off families as a maid and was skilled in making woolen material. She witnessed deserted villages after most local residents fled their homes and became fugitives. She was forced to do harsh, road construction work between Riwoche and Chamdo in 1960. Her love relationship ended tragically. She is Chimé Wangmo's cousin.

## Raised by My Grandparents

**M**y generation was the generation of misfortune. I was destined to suffer from the first day of my birth. Mother was imprudent - a woman of loose morals. She became pregnant and never identified my father. She delivered me in Dondrubling and then mercilessly abandoned me, a few-days-old infant, and ran off with a young Chinese man. We later learned that she had gone to Lhasa.

A nun saw a woman leave her baby in the corner of a room and wondered if the mother had abandoned it. The crying, hungry baby demanded milk heartbrokenly, disturbing the nun. At the end of the day, the nun picked me up and inquired about me and Mother's whereabouts. She then came to my village and gave me to my grandparents.

Grandmother was upset with her irresponsible daughter. It was not the first time Mother had cruelly disappointed her parents, and it would not be the last. Mother could not have cared less what other people thought about her and pursued happiness in her own way. She eventually returned from Lhasa and led her own life with a new man. Occasionally, Mother visited us, but such visits ended in unpleasant quarrels. For me, she was only my biological mother. My grandparents played the role of real parents.

My grandparents were farmers and had a small amount of farmland, which was enough for our subsistence. They also worked for a wealthy village household during harvest and, in return, were allowed us to glean the fields. Like other village women, Grandmother was skilled at spinning, weaving, and dying woolen cloth. She taught me all her skills and I became a skilled wool worker at an early age. Wool products were a major source of extra income.

Sixteen households lived in my village. The Loyul Family was the wealthiest. They had a large barley field, good pasture, and owned so many yaks that people believed they would not notice if fifty yaks went missing from their herd. They lived in a tent in the upper village valley for most of the year. I worked for this family as a maid, and was given meat and barley as payment. If we ran out of food, they always generously provided more.

The wife of the Loyul Family was slow and lazy, and never finished anything. One day, when a guest came to their tent, she moved to restrain their furious dog, but then stepped on her loosely tied, sagging sash and suddenly her nakedness was exposed, embarrassing everyone.

The Loyul Family called all the villagers to help harvest with their own family members. As usual, they gave meals during work time and remains of grain heads to us. In winter, they gave sausages and yams to all the village households.

From the age of twenty to twenty-six, I worked as a maid for various households and made woolen products in my spare time.

My uncle was a monk at Dondrubling Monastery. Since my village was subordinate to the monastery, we paid no taxes to local chiefs. Instead, my village was required to provide free labor to repair roofs and refresh the colors of the monastery walls. My village was not the only subordinate village. Others were also involved in maintaining the monastery's walls and roofs.

The monastery provided a meal of rice mixed with butter and brown sugar when we worked there. The amount of food we were given was more than enough so we took a good portion of it home and ate it for days. Children loved this food.

## My First Child

A tall, handsome man named Samten was about my age. He was born in Zurmang and lived in Norbuling Village. He flirted with me, we became good friends, and he often visited me at night. Since Grandfather was blind and Grandmother was mentally ill, they were unaware of his visits. I followed my mother's free-spirit path and gave into my basic nature. I never knew who my father was and Mother was not entitled to give me a moral education. If there was a legacy from Mother, it was a free spirit of indulgence. I became pregnant at the age of twenty-one, bringing more emotional disturbance to Grandmother. It seemed I was deliberately following Mother's path to oppose Grandmother's will.

When my son was four years old, I delivered a baby girl.

Grandfather gradually became blind. Holding a walking stick, he slowly made his way across the yard, and then on to the village center where elders gathered and chatted. His blindness did not bother me much, but Grandmother's abnormal behavior and emotional illness haunted both Grandfather and me. When Grandmother's condition worsened, Uncle invited a lama to perform rituals, which did not help much. We could no longer control Grandmother, who wandered around Dondrubling and Norbuling.

In 1958, the government policy dramatically changed. Conflicts spread like disease. Rumors and bad news were like a river that floods every day. People were afraid of being arrested and escaped to the mountains, which was beyond my capacity. I could not imagine a blind old man, a mad old woman, and two children could escape. Neighbors and relatives suggested that I stay in the village since I had an ideal social background, which is what I did because I had no choice.

There was fighting and shooting in Dondrubling for a day and then monks and men fled, leaving barley and butter there. I brought some home. I was a bit scared at night in the utter tranquility of the nearly-empty village. Even no dogs barked at night.

A month later, soldiers poured into Dondrubling, filling the valley with so many camouflage uniforms that it resembled a ripe barley field. The soldiers did not bother us. Some were sympathetic

and gave us leftover food. My son liked Chinese food and particularly anything with fried green onions. I went to Dondrubling every day to beg food from the Chinese.

One day, hundreds of monks bound together were being marched somewhere. They had ropes around their necks and their hands were tied behind them as soldiers with guns walked behind them. Two village girls and I, thinking they were monks from Dondrubling Monastery, cried and raced to them. We were relieved when we learned they were from Bumda Monastery, but then I recognized my cousin among the monks. He was barefoot, exhausted, and frightened. I raced home, got a pair of new boots, chased after them, and gave him the boots and some dried meat. I helped him put on the boots while he was walking.

A few days later, soldiers marched west to suppress the rebellion and tranquility returned to the village. Winter came and I made sure we had enough food.

Grandmother looked mad and acted insanely. She went to the military camp and took food from the kitchen. Cooks and guards chased her away, but never beat nor arrested her. Madness had its advantages.

The next year, more and more people gave up their fugitive life and returned home. We were organized by the government to convert pasture to farmland. We worked from early morning to evening and were given very little food. Some overseers, both Tibetan and Chinese, lashed us with whips no matter how hard we worked.

It was hard not to break the rules, and then be lashed with whips. I guess some overseers were in the habit of using whips in the same way some riders constantly whip their galloping horse.

We stayed at the police station yard in Dondrubling at night. Many got sick and died from exhaustion and starvation. I constantly worried about my grandparents and children. I could not see them since I was required to sleep at the camp. It was an hour's walk from the work site to the police station.

There was a group of young Chinese men and women who wore ragged clothes - the *qingnian kaihuang* 'young people cultivating land', who were mostly from Henan Province and camped on the pasture. They aimed to bring 'wasteland into cultivation' and

planned a permanent settlement. They used tractors and other machines and tools to plow and plant barley and oats.

When I noticed a pile of oats in the *qingnian kaihuang* camp, I quietly filled my robe pouch, secretly brought it home at night, and then returned to the camp before daybreak.

Those were hard times and I could not sleep well, but I had to work during the daytime under the overseers' brutal whipping.

### The Road to Chamdo

Some months later, strong laborers were selected for a road construction project in Riwoche. Seventy of us, both men and women, were selected. I was allowed to go home to say goodbye before our departure. My daughter wanted to go with me. I told her that I would return with candies in a few days. I left behind a blind old man, a mad old woman, and two children.

Our group marched south with soldier escorts. Five days later, we reached Riwoche, a forested area bordering Nangchen County. It was challenging to construct a road there. Dense forest had to be cleared before road construction could begin. Logging was done by the soldiers who used saws and axes to cut down trees. Seventy of us from Dondrubling were in a team. There were many other teams from different regions. We dug up roots and leveled the ground to make the road. Some trees were so enormous that as many as forty people could take refuge under a single tree with broad branches and not get wet.

Road workers had the right to rest and chat with workmates.

The Chinese overseers were far less brutal than the Tibetans, who were never without whips in their hands. Their skills at riding and swinging whips also surpassed those of their Chinese counterparts. Workers were thinly spread out over this freshly exposed dark soil that snaked through the valley until it vanished into the distance. Though it seemed an ideal place to hide in, but no one escaped successfully. With swinging whips, riders chased runaways, who were soon exhausted and collapsed on the road.

I silently cursed Gamtso from Dondrubling, who was in charge of our team. She bullied us until the end of the roadwork. Her brutality toward other women was worse than that of the overseers.

Everyone was scared of and hated her. Gamtso wore a Mao suit and cap. Two braids hung down her back. She spoke good Chinese, used Chinese terms when she spoke Tibetan, and urged people to work hard all the time. One time, when we were working near a mountain pass, there were no trees for shelter. A Chinese officer called out, "It's raining. Come back."

Gamtso shouted back, "No! We won't surrender to the challenges until we accomplish our revolutionary goals!" and scolded her supervisor for lacking revolutionary zeal, leaving him speechless. We worked in mud until we were completely soaked and some of us got sick. Illness was deadly if the overseers did not give you permission to go home. Even so, going home was a hard journey for ill people because it required many days of walking.

One day, Gamtso killed a red-faced young woman who wore a sheepskin robe. She was in her mid-twenties and from Khamgo Village near the Yangtze. I don't know what made Gamtso so angry. Gamtso beat her to the ground and kicked her as she pleaded, "Sister Gamtso, please don't beat me! I beg you!"

When that poor girl stopped moving, Gamtso said, "You are pretending," and kicked her body face up. She was dead and her face was covered with mud and blood. Gamtso said, "This dead woman is an example," and ordered us to roll her corpse from a cliff into the Mekong.

Gamtso was not charged in the death and then kicked a boy to death on the muddy road a few days later. His corpse was completely covered in mud, as though it was a mud-covered short log, lying horizontally in the road.

Yangdzom, a woman from Norbuling Village, flattered Gamtso, avoiding mistreatment. Yangdzom had a big *zi* and gave it to Gamtso who wore it on a string around her neck. Everyone in our team knew that the *zi* had belonged to Yangdzom.

The food was never enough. Soldiers killed whatever wildlife they found in the forest. Occasionally we had blue sheep meat in our food. One day, soldiers killed some dogs from a village and cooked dog meat soup. We asked for some bones to chew on but were refused. We had a few *luan* and bought the remaining bones from the

soup. The bones were overcooked and I could chew them and get a little taste.

Another day, after the soldiers killed a brown bear, an officer took the gall bladder and skin, and cooked bear meat for us. The bear was large so everyone got pieces of bear meat in their bowls.

Our shoes were soon worn out and soil and gravel entered from holes in the soles. We were given leather to repair our soles but instead, we roasted the leather and chewed it, though it was very hard. We had to chew it a long time until it softened and we could swallow it. Chewing leather all day long made my cheeks sore. Even talking triggered pain in my cheek muscles.

The number of our team members shrank from seventy to forty. Some died, some got sick and went home, and others were arrested for being counterrevolutionaries. Anything was sufficient for an accusation. People accused others to protect themselves. Accusing someone meant you were on the right side and being accused meant you were on the wrong side. Actually, there was no difference between road construction and the labor camp. The only difference was that we could go home after the road was completed.

A young woman in the back of a truck on her way to a labor camp cried out, "Good bye, Yang. I'll be in jail."

Xiao Yang, a young Chinese soldier about her age, sobbed and waved to her.

As the new road extended to Chamdo, the construction passed through a village. During a break, I went to the village and saw a big stone house with wooden walls in front. "It must be a wealthy household," I thought. It was very quiet. I entered the gate to the yard. No one was there. I saw dry yak meat hanging from the ceiling. I stuffed some in my robe and trousers. Dry meat enlarged my robe and trousers. My shadow on the ground resembled that of a woman who was nine months pregnant. The hard dry meat poked my thighs and hurt me as I walked. I shared the meat with two of my friends who were both from Norbuling Village. We knew each other before we worked on road construction.

After nine months of hard work at a cost of losing more than half of my team, the road reached Chamdo, a small town located at



the confluence of two mighty rivers. We were not allowed to visit the town and were then sent home.

Worry and anxiety mingled as I approached my home. I had been without any news of my family for ninth months. I wanted to have warm hugs from my children and grandparents. "Without me, how could they survive?" I wondered, expecting the worst. When I finally got home, I realized it had been empty for a long time. A village woman informed me that my grandparents had died.

### My Grandparents Drank Truck Oil

Grandfather found a half-tin of transmission grease in the military camp's waste dump. Thinking it was old butter, he shared it with Grandmother. They ate it with *tsampa*, but could not digest it. Grandmother died that night and Grandfather died the next morning. Fortunately, my children were not there at the time. After my grandparents' death, my three-year-old daughter was sent to the orphanage in Dondrubling. My son was cared for by some people at the site where pasture was being converted to farmland. An old cook helped him collect barley and cooked it, and also shared his bed with him.

When I found my son, I thanked the cook, took my son, and headed to the orphanage, looking for my daughter. I found her. She had a shaved head, gaunt pale face, and a runny dirty nose. Wounds and infections covered most of her legs since she often peed and defecated in her pants. Unable to control my emotion, tears ran down my face as I embraced and kissed her.

The orphanage had many children who had no knowledge of what had happened to their parents and relatives. Many were true orphans. A woman at the orphanage told me that a Chinese soldier had seen my daughter picking undigested barley, beans, and corn from human feces. He then took her to a pile of barley near their camp. She did not return to the orphanage that night. The next day someone found her with her belly swollen like a balloon and in great pain. Eating too much barley had nearly killed her.

I had no food stored at home, the rations were inadequate, and now I had to feed my children. I worked in the daytime on the

farmland. In my spare time, I stole beans and barley, but only in the daytime. Stealing at night was dangerous and carried a high risk of being sent to jail. I once stole beans, put them in my robe pouch, and shared them with two of my friends. We had nineteen cups of beans in total.

When a woman from another village suggested we steal food at night, I told her that I only stole during the day. Anyway, she went off alone at night, was caught, and tied to a pole. I went near her and said, "Why didn't you listen to me?"

She said, "I was so hungry so I went alone. They haven't beaten me yet."

A barrel near a military camp was oozing rapeseed oil. This was not obvious if you didn't notice the oil trace on the ground. I put three liquor bottles into my robe pouch, probed the leaking hole, sucked oil through the hole, and then spit the oil into the bottles. It took me a long time to fill the bottles. I gave one bottle of oil to each of my two friends who did not mind that the oil had been sucked and spat into the bottles. My mouth muscles were so sore I could not chew food properly for a couple of days.

My village was abandoned in 1965 when villagers moved to Norbuling. My son became a capable thief and often stole food for us. I worked for the commune and never had political problems because I belonged to the oppressed class. I continued weaving and spinning to earn money to buy tea and shoes.

I prematurely delivered another son in 1966. He was so tiny that an adult man's two palms just covered his back and buttocks. His eyes were like those of a newborn kitten. The midwife thought he would die. I opened his eyes with my tongue, and later was blamed for my son's funny looking eyes and his nickname. All the villagers knew who my baby's father was, since he had Tenpa's eagle nose that all his other children also had. Tenpa fathered another son with another woman in the village. He was not handsome like my older son's father, but he often brought me gifts. He and his wife quarreled for some days after she noticed our relationship.

I ended the relationship with Tenpa when Gaga entered my life. My time with him was the happiest and worst times of my life. Gaga was single and did not mind that I had three children with three

different fathers. He promised to live with me for the rest of his lifetime. He was decent and kind to my two younger children. My older son was often caught by policemen for stealing food from work units. He had his own life and rarely came home.

Gaga was not my formal husband. I never visited his parents home. Gaga had two brothers and one sister, who were all of marriageable age, but lived with their parents. They all lacked a sense of romance, as if they had been born to be single. Gaga was different. He was the only one in his family who seemed interested in romance.

Gaga liked drinking and could not control himself when he was drunk. One day, he went to Dondrubling, had cheap liquor, and got terribly drunk. On his way back home, he met a Chinese middle school girl. He chased, raped, and murdered her. He then covered her with some rocks. The girl's parents informed the police that their daughter was missing when she did not return home. The policemen searched between Dondrubling and Norbuling, found the corpse, and said that she had been raped and murdered.

The girl's parents went mad and vowed to take revenge. All the men in Norbuling who went to Dondrubling that day were arrested and beaten by policemen, who eventually learned that Gaga was the murderer. Angry policemen beat him almost to death and then put cloth in his mouth so that he could not talk. They tied him up, put him in a truck, and took him to Dondrubling.

This unexpected incident was like being hit by lightning. All my hopes and dreams vanished. Clouds again enveloped me. I kept myself inside and expected the worst. It was his destiny and no one could save him.

Some days later, a judicial assembly was held at a site between Dondrubling and Norbuling. Students, work unit members, and villagers were required to attend. Gaga and a man who had killed someone in a fight were executed. Gaga completely disappeared from my life, but the memory of this tragedy haunted me for a long time.

A year later, Paldan Tsering, a red-cheeked man fifteen years my junior entered my life. He was incapable of making money and doing a man's job, but he liked cleaning and washing clothes, and made my home very tidy and cozy. He lived with me until he died from cirrhosis in 2002 when he was in his fifties. Three years later,

my older son died from the same disease. I now live with my younger son and his wife.



# TRASHI JIKME

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Trashi Jikme (b. 1945) lived in Lungpu Village until 2008 and then moved to Norbuling Village. A fugitive in Gozhung and Muzhung, he survived an artillery barrage that struck and burned down his tent. He also witnessed the shooting down of a PLA warplane by Tibetan rebels. He experienced starvation and insanity. He joined the 818 Faction during the Cultural Revolution and was one of the escorts who took prisoners to an assembly, according to Dorje Trashi's account. Dorje Trashi is Trashi Jikme's wife's cousin. Trashi Jikme's wife is also Sonam Trashi's cousin.

## The Harvest

I was born in a small village surrounded by rocky mountains. The mountain behind the village was called Vulture Nest because of the vulture nests there. Vulture Nest Mountain seen from the village, showed vultures as thick as flies against the blue sky.

They slowly flew in circles and landed on the cliff. Ages of accumulated vulture droppings stained the vertical surface of the cliff. It resembled a whitewashed wall and was visible from several kilometers away. Vulture Nest was the village mountain deity, which villagers were proud of and circumambulated once a year.

Rocks, boulders, and stones were ubiquitous village scenery. Two-story houses, courtyards, and the zigzag walls of barley fields were all from stones. No one knew when these walls had been built. They were so old that the original stone colors were covered with green, brown, and yellow mosses. Rock pikas nested in the gaps of the stone walls. There were many stones in the farmland and people worked to clear them, but it seemed that stones grew like potatoes and we never finished removing them all.

I was an only child and never knew who my father was. Mother had eight *mu*<sup>68</sup> of farmland and some livestock. In bad years, we faced a shortage of barley.

My village had fifteen households. Two families had no fields. One was the Paldan Trashi Family, who had farmland until Paldan Trashi's father sold it for a bag of jujubes and some meat. His stupid decision profoundly affected his family. With no farmland, they had no harvest and had to work for other households during harvest. They were then allowed to glean the fields once the harvest was over. Mother often asked Paldan Trashi to help and later he gleaned about two bags of grain heads from our fields.

A meter-long handful of shrubs was tied with leather strips. Two bunches were joined using a short leather string. A beater called *khoma* was used to separate grain from the heads. Ten people worked as a team. Five people were in one row and worked the grain heads together as the other five team members raised their *khoma* ready to beat. Each team also sang, praising the *khoma*.

I was assigned to drive the yaks transporting the harvest to the threshing ground. I once threw a stone at a yak loaded with grain. The yak then ran and the stalks it was carrying fell into the river. Mother scolded me for that.

I was a good runner and often chased yaks. People called me Yak Herder. The wealthy Loyul Family lived on the top of the southern mountain and had over 300 yaks. My family herded fifty male yaks for them. In return, they gave us a yak leg whenever they slaughtered a yak.

We sold dry yak dung to Norbuling residents for extra income. Mother had a few regular yak dung customers. One was the wealthy Norbuling Family, who had a three-story stone house with only one entrance. A few small windows were visible from outside and a big skylight in the middle of house allowed light to stream down from the third floor to the ground floor.

Norbuling was the name of a family and also the village name. The Norbuling Family claimed that they were the first household in Norbuling Village and were proud of their name. They owned a big

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<sup>68</sup> One *mu* = 614 square meters; eight *mu* = 1.3 acres.

piece of farmland and a big threshing ground behind their house. The size of their threshing ground was about the size of their farmland.

Most Norbuling Villagers, including the Norbuling Family, carved *mani* stones for a living. They transported white stones from a mountain top using yaks. The Norbuling Family often asked me to herd their yaks when they quarried stones. We put stones into two leather bags per yak and then drove the yaks back to the village. I got brown sugar for my work.

### Chinese Come with Beasts with Two Backs

One day, I saw a strange beast with two backs in a courtyard - a camel. I was fascinated, but dared not go near it. The camels chewed something all the time like a goat. Camels were used to transport supplies for the Chinese Army.

Increasing numbers of camels and Chinese came to Norbuling Village. They convened meetings in the village. The translators spoke a strange dialect called Amdo, which I could barely understand.

The government organized a tour to inner China and Lugu, the head of the Norbuling Family was selected to join the tour, which traveled to some big cities to see industrialized areas. The group returned in two months with many stories about trains, boats, planes, factories, and so on. Lugu said, "If you put a full bowl of tea on a fast moving table on the train, not a single drop of tea spills out." Lugu bought a 'fifty-four' pistol<sup>69</sup> during the tour, as did others. Lugu said, "The government will modernize our home village and then we will have big machines like the ones they have."

The Drawu Chief returned from his trip to Lhasa in the spring of 1958, but did not directly come to the village. The situation had changed, he and his retinue stayed in the nearby mountains. One night, he sent some men to take his son and daughters from Norbuling.

On the fifteenth day of the third lunar month in 1958, a meeting was held in the Drongme Family yard. They had the biggest stone house in Norbuling Village. It had three stories and a big open

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<sup>69</sup> A Chinese copy of the Soviet Tokarev TT-33.



skylight in the middle. The house had almost seventy rooms. The Chinese work team liked this house and used it as their work place.

Mother went to the meeting, returned late in the evening with wet eyes and a sad face, and reported that the Chinese had read out a list of names. These people were then grabbed by soldiers and tied with wet rope the soldiers took from a pot of water. The courtyard gate was closed. Soldiers guarded from the roofs and atop walls.

Wang Zhanjun and Jinpa Khache were two assistants. They helped tie-up people and both became paid government workers. Jinpa Khache's nickname was Big Mouth. In 1975, he married a woman almost twenty years his junior who already had a daughter. Jinpa Khache was an alcoholic and, after he beat his mother-in-law several times, she took her granddaughter and lived separately.

The name list was expanded to include ordinary villagers. Three men were arrested from my village, including Lodro Zangpo, who was poor and had no farmland. He was released two years later. Another was Nyigo, the poorest man in our village, who was also the butcher. People wondered, "If Nyigo was arrested, then who would not be arrested?"

Some people did not participate in the meeting, though their names were called. For example, the heads of the Adro Family were not arrested. Two men shared one wife in the Adro Family. Ten days after the meeting, many people escaped to the mountains with some of their belongings.

Kunga Tsering and the family of Ngakyak [a nun] were Mother's relatives. We formed a group and followed the Drawu Chief.

### Following the Drawu Chief

The first day, we saw a dead man lying on his back dressed in a black-cloth-covered lambskin robe. I was terrified at seeing a corpse, but was so curious that I looked at it the next day when I was searching for a missing yak. The corpse had been turned over.

We reached Gozhung many days later. Our group killed a yak and shared the meat equally. Kecho, Kunga Tsering's assistant, and I herded our yaks around a rock ridge on a small hill where there were many camps.

Suddenly, we heard bombs explode and gunfire from the other side of the hill. We saw a plane descending, leaving smoke behind, and then disappear into the horizon. We thought the plane had landed. Actually, adults later said that the plane had been shot down and crashed on a meadow, creating a long, plow-like scar in the earth. Two pilots had survived the crash and had shot at those who approached. It took a long time to gun down the two pilots. People took whatever they could from the plane. A man brought a piece of metal as big as a pot lid that he guessed was from the wing. Some took metal for horse pegs, which were important for people on the treeless Plateau.

The planes generally flew so low you could read their numbers and Chinese characters. After this plane was shot down, no planes dared fly low again.

Some people said the Drawu Chief shot that plane down with a machine gun.

Weapons had not been confiscated in Ayong, a community in Gozhung. They were brave and fought fiercely. Later that day, some boys came from the Ayong group and shouted, "The enemies are coming!"

We always wanted to know where the Drawu Chief group was and then camped near them. The Drawu Chief's group was the chief target of the Chinese. Each time the Chinese soldiers got near them, the Drawu Chief's group fled with their horses and mules. I believed that their deity protected Drawu, otherwise how could they always successfully break through the enemy's net? Our group always kept an eye on the Drawu Chief's group.

### A Shell Strikes My Tent

Night was quiet. Gunfire started after dawn. Mother called me several times. I lazily continued sleeping. A few minutes later when everyone was gone, I regretted being lazy. I put on my woolen cloth robe, pulled my sash on, and put on my boots without tying them.

I saw Lama Terlodro in our group. He was cutting the ropes of a tied, frightened horse that was jumping and bucking. He tried to saddle a horse. I heard, "Soo! Soo!" as bullets flew through the air

above me. I had no time to watch Lama Terlodro and ran toward the river where our yaks were running. The river was big and I dared not cross it unaided. I grabbed the tail of a female yak belonging to my family and pushed her into the water. My body was completely soaked by the cold water and my boots were pulled off by the river current. The yak dragged me to the other bank. I looked back and saw several platoons lined up diagonally, marching toward the Drawu Chief's group while firing. The Drawu Chief's group raced downslope. Later, people said that two people fell in the shooting, but I did not see that.

I saw a bomb hit my family's tent and set it afire. The tent was not pitched properly so as to avoid more work. One side was high and the other was low. I worried about the chained dog near the tent. I had forgotten to free the dog. I saw a group running up who might be our group. I was hungry and cold. The gunfire ceased as the sun rose above the eastern horizon. I found a rock ridge and leaned against it, facing the bright, hot summer sun. My robe dried in a few hours. I was hungry and weak as I walked barefoot toward the hillside.

In the late afternoon I saw a black tent and called to the owner, but no one responded. Not even a dog barked. I went behind the tent, put my arm through the gap between the tent's side section and the ground, and touched a leather bag. Its mouth was tied shut so it took me some time to get my hand inside and find dried cheese. I took some and entered the tent. I saw a bag of *tsampa* hanging on the center pole. I did not try to find butter. I took the *tsampa* behind the tent and ate some without water and butter.

I slept and woke up the next morning. I took the bag of *tsampa* and went to the upper valley where all of our group were. When Mother saw me, she cried and hugged me. She thought I had been killed by the bomb that struck our tent. Norbuling people were also there. As the Norbuling people were slaughtering yaks, Mother asked them to not slaughter her yaks. The yak that dragged me across the river was there, too.

There was talk about a bomb that had struck the Sershul Family's tent, killing the parents and some children. The Sershul Family was from Norbuling. Their grandparents had probably come from Sershul. Later, many people knew the Sershul Family tragedy.

The two daughters and a son of the family survived. One daughter later married a Chinese man from Henan Province, but they divorced some years later and she returned to Norbuling in the 1980s with her teenage daughter who barely spoke Tibetan. Her daughter married a Monguor [Tu] man from Huzhu<sup>70</sup> and has lived there since.

The son's nickname was Crazy Sershul. He was an alcoholic, constantly murmured, and was jailed in the 1970s after he pointed his finger at a picture of Chairman Mao and said, "You killed my family." He was released in 1983 and then drank himself to death within a few years.

The next day, our group went over the mountain. Lama Lodru had binoculars, which I loved. He let me use them. We saw some tents in the distance and guessed that they were the Chinese camp. Actually, soldiers quietly approached us from the other side while we were watching their camp. Blacksmith Karma, Laké, and another man mounted their horses and fled. The three of them ended up in India and returned home after 1985.

I rode a saddled yak. Uncle gave me an India-made bayonet, which I put behind my sash from inside my robe. The soldiers came and collected all the weapons, including knives. I put my bayonet under the yak saddle. The translator was an Amdo man who searched my robe and found nothing. They arrested the men, and older boys, including Dawa from Norbuling. He was about nineteen years old. I was not old enough to be arrested.

We returned home in the late summer of 1958. Norbuling was almost a ghost village. I climbed from wall to wall, house to house, looking for candy and crystal sugar on the altar of family shrines. I opened cabinet drawers and looked for anything that might be fun. I found dried, moldy *torma*<sup>71</sup> on an altar. Water in vats had become sticky.

Tenpa, an eagle-nosed boy, was my friend. We went house to house for fun and looking for food.

In autumn, people from Dondrubling came to Norbuling to harvest the barley. I was assigned to assist a veterinarian and was paid

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<sup>70</sup> Huzhu Tu Autonomous County, Haidong City.

<sup>71</sup> *Torma* are figures made from flour and butter used in rituals and as offerings.

with bread and a bag of flour. After harvest, almost all the grain was taken, leaving very little for locals. Many starved to death that winter. The next spring, grain was spread on the mountain and plowed pasture. Very little was achieved.

### Mother is Arrested

One day, Mother was assigned to collect shrubs with Trashi Chozang and four others. Trashi Chozang was a marmot hunter and a proletarian activist. They found a yak grazing on a mountain top, which belonged to the commune. When Trashi Chozang suggested they kill a yak, Mother said, "We don't have a rope and a knife. How can we kill it?"

Trashi Chozang said, "Don't worry. We do," and then they slaughtered the yak and divided the meat.

Later, when the missing yak was noticed, the leader looked for the thief. Trashi Chozang confessed the theft, but said that it was the suggestion came from Mother, who then became a struggle target. Zealots from the crowd shouted and tried to beat her, but the Chinese soldiers stopped them. Mother was then sent to a labor camp for re-education.

Norbuling residents were given *tsampa* that was two-thirds yak dung ash. Adding ash tripled the amount. The ash and *tsampa* was not well mixed, I carefully licked the *tsampa* and left the gray ash. Dondrubling residents were never given ash mixed with *tsampa*.

A bowl of *tsampa* could be traded for an amber decoration and a *zi*. A few Chinese restaurants in Dondrubling sold vegetable soup. Some people went to Dondrubling for vegetable soup. Some died on the way. I heard that so-and-so became blind, fainted, and died. Fainting was a sign of impending death from starvation.

I starved after Mother was jailed. One day, everything turned dark. I tried to open my eyes. I thought I was dying. I fainted. Later when I woke up, I saw the mountains and houses, held onto the walls, and managed to reach the commune dining hall.

## I Become Mad

In the next few days, my chest ached. Full of resentment, I was afraid of nothing and ready to do whatever I wanted. Moreover, I saw things others didn't see. Red horses were running across the river and sometimes the horses overtook each other. It seemed that they were racing. At times, I saw many red dogs running up the mountains. It didn't matter if my eyes were open or closed, day or night, the dogs were always there. The pain in my chest made me fearless. I hated those who looked at me and threw rocks at them. People said I was mad.

I went to a mill house and ate *tsampa*. The mill operator was Dege Tsering. He was originally from Dege and spoke with a Dege accent. He caught me and locked me in a room near the mill house. I shouted from the dark room. Three boys came to the door after Dege Tsering left and said, "We'll open the door. Don't come out until we open the door." Then, from some distance away, they shouted, "The door is open!"

I opened the door and saw them running from me. Later, one boy said that I jumped out from the room with a rock in my right hand.

I was later very afraid of rooms and dared not go inside in fear I might be locked inside. I slept outside every night.

When I went to the mill house again, Dege Tsering chased me. I climbed up on the mill house where he dried his boiled tea leaves. I said, "If you catch me, I'll throw away your tea."

He said, "Don't do that boy. I'll give you some *tsampa*."

I came down and he gave me a big piece of *tsampa* with some butter. He said, "If you bother me again, I'll lock you in the room."

One day, I stole some *tsampa* from the mill house in Lungda. I came out of the mill house with my face and hands covered with *tsampa*, and accidentally encountered a monk and Samten, the village leader. They grabbed me and said, "You stole *tsampa*."

I said, "I didn't steal. It was my hands that stole."

They sympathetically let me keep the stolen *tsampa*. Some days later, they assigned me to the mill operator. Since I worked in

the mill house, I could eat *tsampa* regularly. I gained strength and recovered.

I was mad for about a month.

Mother was released about a year later.

I also stole food from the military camp. The soldiers burned sagebrush as fuel. After cooking, the cooks dumped water on the ash. The chimney and ash hole were outside the kitchen. I entered from the ash hole, pushed the pot up from the bottom and then went into the kitchen and stole bread. I was covered with soot and looked like a coal miner. After Mother was released, I stopped wandering.

# DONYAK

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Donyak (b. 1940) witnessed and participated in a village rebellion against soldiers and policemen. His family's property was looted by Mongolian soldiers. He became a fugitive. He nearly died from diarrhea and malnutrition in a labor camp. He lived in his village after he returned. He was satisfied with his retired life.

## Village Rebellion

**I**n the late 1950s, policemen and soldiers were based in the village and investigated household economies in order to classify peasants. While doing this they also checked who had what weapons. They came to homes during supper or late evening without advance notification. Sometimes they searched for sparrow nests with their flashlights and then punched the nests with sharp sticks as part of the Four Pests movement inspired by and imposed by the Great Leader.

Drawu Jimed died peacefully. The Drawu Family planned to store his corpse in an earth pyramid. They invited the Sakya Master, who happened to be visiting Dondrubling Monastery. He suggested that the family cremate the body and the family did so. A later incident of dogs eating dried flesh from an opened pyramid of the Desar Family had proved how wise the Sakya Master's advice was.

The young Drawu Chief planned a pilgrimage to Lhasa as a way of fulfilling his religious obligation for his recent deceased father. The young chief was lucky to be absent from the village since the government strictly imposed democratic reform, which meant all obstructions had to be removed. Those resisting the reforms were liable to be arrested. Meetings were called. Meetings were called as a way of gathering people for mass arrests and detention. In Norbuling Village, only Lugu suggested that they fight back when they realized that the meeting was a trap. Detainees were handcuffed or their hands



were tied with ropes. 'Japanese' handcuffs were readied for those who resisted. Such handcuffs became tighter with resistance.

In the summer of 1958, villages and tribes under the Drawu Chief's administration launched a campaign to rescue detainees. Jara Lama, the self-proclaimed King Gesar, and his troops, a camp consisting one hundred tents positioned themselves at the southeast mountaintop of Dondrubling. Jara Lama saw strategic importance in capturing the military airport in Patang. This would deal the Chinese a heavy blow. The Gesar troops attacked the airport, but failed with some casualties due to a lack of heavy weapons and explosives. The Chinese had the airport under heavy guard, knowing its strategic value. Their heavy machine guns kept the attackers at bay.

Jezang tribesmen burned down government owned shops in Dondrubling and looted at will. Lungpu and Lungda, village men, looted commune livestock in a cooperative farm near Dondrubling.

Unlike rural villages, my village could not avoid having our guns confiscated and our best men arrested. Those of us who remained in the village, fearfully joined the cooperative as the Chinese ordered, which was exactly what we had resisted.

Pachu, Lukzong, and Tutob Namyal were *bokyoung* 'leader of a hundred' and led troops from the eight villages and three monasteries from the Yangtze River Valley. They positioned themselves at my village's north mountaintop.

Gakla led village troops to purposely graze their horses in my village's barley fields to punish us for cooperating with the Chinese. They ordered villagers to bring water and dried yak dung to the mountaintop. When they came down to the chief's house, they encountered soldiers and policemen. They killed two Chinese soldiers, one Tibetan policeman, and injured a Tibetan policeman named Wangyal. Remaining policemen and Chinese soldiers withdrew to their stronghold in the Drongme Family house, a rammed wall structure with three floors.

Gakla Village men summoned our village men to gather at the chief's house. Absence meant being labeled a Chinese lover. Around sixty men went to the chief house. The Galka men were angry. Holding rifles, they scolded us for being traitors, Chinese lovers, and henchmen of the communists. One leader said, "You Norbuling

people sent your best men to jail and then cooperate with the Chinese. What do you think you are?"

Some young men pointed at the livestock room and shouted, "Go inside!" We were then locked inside the animal room. The manure mixed with water leaking from the roof created a smell so strong that it hurt our eyes. The heat and the odor were unbearable. Many of us took off all our clothes. The miserable groaning of the injured policeman in this narrow, crowded, smelly, filthy room reminded us of the hell realms. We could only breathe fresh air through a small paneless window.

Gakla men identified seven men as key Chinese lovers and locked them in a room that had formerly been used to roast barley for the chief's family.

Wangyal begged for someone to drag him into the shade or bring him water drink. His repeated entreaties were ignored. I peered through a small window and saw a dead soldier lying at the gate. Wangyal was exposed under the hot afternoon sun. His hips and feet were covered with blood, attracting flies. He groaned and begged someone to shoot him.

In the evening, I heard gunshots and found this poor policeman had been shot in the neck. His throat had been torn open like a slaughtered sheep. Blood seeped into the ground.

The next morning, they released us all. The seven selected men were released that afternoon. Gakla people asked a woman in my village, "What are the soldiers and policemen doing?"

She said, "They have taken good positions on top of the *mani* wall." Actually the soldiers and policemen withdrew to a house and refused to come out. Later she said that she was afraid her children would get hurt if fighting took place around Drongme's house.

My villagers were innocent. We neither sent our leaders and rich men to jail, nor did we actively join the socialist cooperative. Accusations made by those from Gakla were pointless. The Tibetan regarded us as Chinese lovers and the Chinese thought that we were participating in the rebellion. Our village was caught between two stones. Hating the label "Chinese lovers," we were eager to show that we were with the rebel villages. I took a chopping knife from my kitchen and put inside my front pouch. Dawa Tsering, known for his

squinting eyes, put his father's sword under his sash horizontally. Others suggested that Dawa Tsering should give his sword to Dorje, who was brave, but only had a chopping knife. Dawa Tsering reluctantly exchanged his sword for Dorje's chopping knife. People joked, "Now it is Dorje's turn to demonstrate his bravery."

When someone reported that a village woman was visiting Drongme Family house, everyone was excited, especially the young men. We rushed to the stupa adjacent to the Drongme Family house while shouting our war cry, "*Ki he he!*" Soldiers and policemen must have thought that they were under attack and opened machine gun fire. As red bullets streaked through the evening they hurled a grenade that exploded a safe distance from us. Everyone stopped shouting and looked for shelter behind the stupa. The blacksmith, Karma, said, "Tonight, they will come to us. We need a man with a gun to protect us. Awo Rinchen has a gun. Please bring him here."

Awo Rinchen was with Tutob Wangyal and other Gakla men in a home next to the Drongme Family house. Awo Rinchen had been on a trip to Lhasa when guns were collected and so was the only man in my village who still had a gun. Pasang Tsering and I were told to bring Awo Rinchen. When we opened the gate of the house next to the Drongme Family house, the Chinese noticed us and hurled something from the window. It emitted the smell of gunpowder. Pasang Tsering pushed me inside the room and shouted, "Grenade!" just before it exploded with a deafening sound, extinguishing the lamp inside the room. Everything became dark. Panic rose among us. The Gakla men inside the room withdrew into a dark corner and kept saying, "Where are the Chinese? Where are the Chinese?"

I asked Awo Rinchen to protect us that night. He agreed and said goodbye to others. We then left the house and moved toward the *mani* wall. He gave his type 38 rifle to Pasang Tsering to hold while he climbed up the *mani* wall. When we heard a group of people approaching, Pasang Tsering nervously said, "Awo Rinchen, Awo Rinchen, the Chinese are coming, the Chinese are coming."

Awo Rinchen jumped down to the ground and said, "Coward! Why you are so scared of holding a loaded rifle?" and grabbed the gun. Actually the Chinese were not coming, it was our local people returning home from the stupa.

The three of us climbed to the top of the *mani* wall and watched the Drongme Family house under the moonlight to ensure no one was coming out. Awo Rinchen said, "I will pick them off one by one if they come out." He was known for his marksmanship and was capable of doing what he said.

Later that night, three of us left the *mani* wall and slept on the rooftop of Awo Rinchen's gate. A dog barked furiously from the riverside. Awo Rinchen grabbed his gun, jumped off the roof, and raced toward the noise. Pasang Tsering and I followed. We saw a dozen King Gesar horsemen marching to Dondrubling.

The next morning, someone saw a Chinese soldier had been killed on the way to Dondrubling. It had surely been done by the King Gesar horsemen.

All attempt to rescue the prisoners failed due to a lack of explosives. Two weeks from the beginning of the rescue campaign, news came of PLA reinforcements. This proved so frightening that many fled into the mountains. My family followed other villagers. We moved from Dzando to Jezang, and finally reached Gozhung where I saw a plane shot down. Some said the Drawu Chief had personally shot it. Chinese soldiers then besieged our camp. Somehow we managed to escape to Muzhung.

People in our group were mostly from our village. We saw an Amdo Tibetan man appear from downhill. A Chinese captain with a walking stick in left hand and a pistol in his right. When he got near the Amdo man, the Amdo Tibetan shouted, "Don't be afraid. Don't attempt to do anything stupid!"

The Chinese captain shouted something in return. We then realized that soldiers were everywhere and some of them were so close to us that we did not notice. Two machine guns were already well positioned and had targeted us from a hill above. We panicked. Some people waved a piece of wool to signal our surrender. They came to our camp. These soldiers were Mongolians. They looked different than the Han Chinese and they also spoke differently. These Mongolian soldiers were rude and cruel. They cut open our barley bags and cheese bags with their bayonets and poured the contents on the ground to feed their horses. They lined up monks and beat them with big sticks.

The Amdo Tibetan eloquently lectured about how real monks should behave: "You monks are bandits and pests. Your guns and horses are evidence of your violation of Buddha's will. What kind of monks are you?"

The Mongolian soldiers took whatever of our valuables they liked. They gave us no letters or documents to say that we had surrendered and ordered us to go to Totsé Commune. So we went there and participated in herding and meetings. In the spring of 1960, we were sent to Nangchen to cultivate farmland that had been abandoned by local farmers, who had left everything behind. Most of our group were local herders from Totsé who had never done farm work. We did farmwork poorly.

### Diarrhea

Beside the farm work, we collected wood and shrubs for the brick factory. Each person only received one hundred grams of black beans, and sometimes barley and *tsampa* as daily rations. The work was hard and the food was never enough. Worst of all, our requests for sick leave were rarely approved. The doctors routinely said that such requests reflected only a mental problem. "Hard work can cure mental illness," they said. However, it did not. Many died and many more got sick. Unfortunately, I got diarrhea. I could not control myself and my pants were totally soiled. My stinky pants glued my hips to the bed. This watery diarrhea made me weak and skinny, and I couldn't see clearly. I saw many people shit to death and I thought it was now my turn. I went to see a Chinese doctor and but it was not helpful.

One day, the commune borrowed a Tibetan young female doctor from Dondrubling for a week. When I went to see her, she said, "You look so pathetic. Where do you come from?"

I thought she was arrogant. I answered, "I am from Dondrubling."

"I haven't seen you before. But your accent is right."

"I am from Norbuling Village."

"You are my home mate. Please wait until I finish with these herder patients."

After she finished with the others, she said, "I can cure your diarrhea. Don't worry."

She gave me a glucose drip that miraculously made my sight sharpen in a few minutes. She then gave me two bottles of fish oil and told me to do not tell others. She diagnosed my situation as severe and I then received some rice as a ration for sick people. I also got some days off. Soon I covered completely and returned to work. She was my savior and I wanted to thank her. After I returned to my home, I looked for her in Dondrubling. I learned that she had married a Chinese man and moved to Shanghai. I never had a chance to meet her again.

There was a girl about my age from Lungda Village. She came with her older sister and an old man. Her older sister's husband had died and she was now caring for the old man. We were in the same commune in Nangchen and we were distant relatives. She was assigned to work on the other side of the river.

The older sister asked me to take some rations to her. I crossed the bridge and gave her some barley. She was very sick. She said, "Brother, I won't live very long. Look at this." She took off her clothes and showed her buttocks to me. It was taboo for a woman to show her body to a male relative. But her health problem was so serious that she ignored such norms. She had severe hemorrhoids. A portion of her anus as long as an adult finger had turned inside out from the inflammation. It emitted a terrible smell. She said, "Don't tell my sister. I won't be here when you come next time."

I felt empathy and tore my sheep skin robe into two pieces and gave half to her for a bed cover. I told her I would bring her more food.

The bridge was washed away by a flood the next day. The soldiers worked rebuilding the bridge so I could not visit her the following morning. When I was able to visit she was already dead and her corpse had been taken away. My piece of sheepskin robe had not helped.

In 1962, most Totsé Commune members had died from illness. Survivors were allowed to go home. I returned to my village and joined the local commune. I was neither an activist nor a target. Our commune leader once asked me to oversee some targeted people

to bring yak dung from the commune yak farm. Ache, Lugu, Kunga Zangpo, and I went to the commune's yak farm. Tsegyal was the charge of the farm and poured black tea for us. The targeted people took *tsampa* from their own pouch and ate. Tsegyal then took me to his room and offered milk tea, butter, dried cheese, and *tsampa*.

I watched the men that had come with me finish loading dung from the window as I was drinking milk tea. After they finished loading, each person carried fully loaded bags of dung on their backs. On the way back, Lugu could not catch up with the others. He was too slow. I said, "Awo Lugu, I'll help you carry your bag."

He said, "No, no, son. If anyone sees, you will get terrible punishment." I insisted and he finally let me carry his bag. After the village came into view, I gave the bag back to him.

I have since lived in this village. I have witnessed terrible years, and also years of prosperity. I have several grandchildren. My life has never been as good as it is now. Decades ago, I would not been able to imagine the kind of life that I have now. Some years ago, I had some eye cataracts removed and this brought me light again. If my life were a movie, it would have a happy ending.

# AFTERWORD

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This is my history; like all other histories, a narrative of misery.  
--Samuel Johnson (1709-1784)

A nation that forgets its past can function no  
better than an individual with amnesia.  
--David McCullough (b. 1933)

**I**t took me two decades to complete this book. Four years ago, I picked up my long-dormant draft and talked to a few more people. Some of my earlier consultants had passed away and several of the people mentioned in the narratives had also died. To honor the deceased, some names have been unmasked. Presenting their stories is a good way to commemorate them.

In reviewing what I had written, I felt that I had inserted too many of my own thoughts into the narrators' views so I then revised some of my earlier paragraphs. I had also forgotten certain details that I had originally written in the early days of this project. When I re-read these portions of text, they were like someone else's work, which made the overall narrative more interesting to me. For example, I do not know how many times the Drawu and Dege conflict has been retold nor how reliable it is. It may diverge from or be identical to historical reality.

Only a few retold accounts from narrators are given. Most narratives are the tellers' lived experiences. The validity of these accounts is beyond what I could establish.

Great social changes took place during the time covered in this book. The physical landscape, culture, and way of life were dramatically transformed by these changes. For example, Lungda Village has become a largely ignored footnote in fading memories as native residents move to more densely populated areas in pursuit of what they imagine to be better lives. Locals are progressively outnumbered as Tibetan migrants from various rural areas pour in.



Locals have become a minority in their own villages as Dondrubling has become a regional center. Native residents there are as rare as stars that shine brightly in the daytime.

Lungpu Village has largely retained its original contours where older generations struggle to maintain their traditions, increasingly disturbed by joint pains and strokes. The younger generations in Lungpu Village are not interested in farming and herding and it is only a matter of time before Lungpu Village resembles Lungda.

A village is a basic unit of a larger farming community. Community members know each other because kinship webs can be traced back over several generations. They also assist each other in constructing houses, harvesting crops, and herding. Living in a world where community members know each other sustains social relationships, maintains positive moral behavior, and ensures a measure of equality. When a community becomes a city, acquaintances are replaced by strangers and the pursuit of material life becomes a key focus. All this reshapes the social and economic relations between people and their moral behavior. Locals often complain about declining morality.

In the 1970s, my natal village had about forty people in ten households that included twenty-three children, four grandmothers, and one grandfather. Grandfathers were rare. When I was a teenager, religious activities were permitted. Religious gatherings were soon organized in the larger village during winters. About ninety percent of all attendants were grandmothers. Only a handful of grandfathers sat in the front, facing the monks' row. The grandfathers' chanting was overwhelmed by melodious chanting from the grandmothers. Only occasionally were the old men audible. Where were my grandfathers? This never really occurred to me because most children had no grandfathers.

Recording the past through a few individuals' collective life experiences and memories paints a bigger picture of the past, which is like a mirror, reflecting the impact of tyrannical policy on individuals in rural areas. It highlights the importance of genuine wellbeing at the grassroots level.

All the stories presented here end around the time of the Cultural Revolution's conclusion. Narrators' lives after this time are only described in a few sentences. If another installment of this work becomes a reality, it will be my autobiography that began at the end of the Cultural Revolution. My generation witnessed the dismembering of the commune system, the renaissance of Tibetan culture and religion, and impacts of the Reform and Opening Policy. We continue to experience changes transforming our culture and economy on an unprecedented scale.

I interviewed only several people from a few villages. Tibet is a huge area with thousands of villages and a population exceeding five million. What I present here is a tiny portion of stories among an ocean of stories. Nevertheless, these accounts reflect lived experiences at a particular time. There are many more heartbreaking, emotionally affecting stories to locate and record, but time is rapidly running out before those who still remember our elders and their lives pass away.

The commune showed a film once a month in our village in winter. The films were such familiar reruns that we could describe nearly every scene. Children were excited and cheered the brave soldiers of the revolutionary army who defeated the Guomindang, the Americans, and Japanese troops. I asked Father, "How did our hero, the PLA, eliminate the enemy?"

Father replied, "Who is the real enemy?"

I said, "The Japanese with a toothbrush mustache."

Father said, "You don't understand. The PLA killed both your grandfathers. It was nothing to do with that mustached man. Don't repeat what I just said."

Father's comment neither shocked me nor did it represent a turning point in my ideas. It was just an ordinary comment. It was hard to change the heroic images of The Red Army, The 8<sup>th</sup> Route Army, the PLA, and the Chinese People's Volunteer Army that were embedded in my mind. They were brave, compassionate, good looking, and smart. In contrast, the enemies were brutal, cowardly, and ugly in the films and in little picture books. The PLA was always presented in very positive, appealing ways.

While writing this book, I recalled the films, the little picture books, and my early schooling. My primary school Tibetan teacher told us that the famine in the 1958 was caused by the Soviet Union who forcefully demanded China repay what she had borrowed. This teacher was raised by his aunt after his parents died in 1959, yet he claimed that without Chairman Mao and the Communists, he would not be alive nor teaching in the classroom.

"History is written by the winners," Alex Hailey commented. Such an unprecedented nationwide tragedy in the recent past remains little noticed, even by those who witnessed it. My generation is vaguely aware of what happened, while the following generation is almost completely ignorant of this time period.

This information in this book is but a drop of water in a lake. May there be more books like this that would allow for crosschecking on such events as the annihilation of tribal troops in the summer of 1958. The contemporary Tibetan issue is an aftereffect of the calamity, rather than a conflict between separatists and unity of the China 'motherland'. I hope this book does not fuel hatred but by revealing the past, may make it less likely that history will repeat itself.

Orgyan Nyima

# TIBETAN AND CHINESE TERMS

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## A

ache, a mchod ཡ་མཚོད།

adro trawa, a gro bkra ba ཡ་སྒོ་བཀའ་བ།

amdo, a mdo ཡ་མདོ།

anam, a rnam ཡ་རྣམ།

ane, a ne ཡ་ནེ།

anye, a mye ཡ་མྱེ།

anye machen, a mye rma chen ཡ་མྱེ་མ་ཚེན།

arak, a rag ཡ་རག།

asi chokyong drolma, a sri chos skyong sgrol ma ཡ་ཕྱི་ཚོས་སྐྱོད།

atro, a khro ཡ་ཁྲོ།

atso, a tsho ཡ་ཚོ།

awo, a bo, ཡ་བོ།

awo rinchen, a bo rin chen ཡ་བོ་རིན་ཚེན།

ayong, a yongs ཡ་ཡོངས།

## B

bachen, sba chen བླ་ཚེན།

bachu, 'ba' chu འབའ་ཚུ།

*baihu* 百户

bakbak, sbag sbag བླག་བླག།

bakmo, 'bag mo འབག་མོ།

bande, ban de བན་དེ།

bangchen, bang chen བང་ཚེན།

*baojiazhi* 保甲制

bari, bar ri བར་རི།

baroktang, 'ba' rog thang འབའ་རོག་ཐང།

beri, be ri བེ་རི།

bokyong, bod skyong བོད་སྐྱོད།

bonchen, bon chen བོན་ཚེན།  
 borokala, bo rog ka la བོ་རོ་ཀ་ལ།  
 botar kalzang, bo thar skal bzang བོ་ཐར།  
 bu tsewa, bu tshe ba འཇུ་ཚེ་བ།  
 buchen, bu chen འཇུ་ཚེན།  
 bul, sbrul ལྷུ་ལ།  
 bumchu, 'bum chu འབུ་མ་ཚུ།  
 bumda, 'bus mda' འབུ་ས་མདལ།  
 bure, 'bu ras འབུ་ར་ས།  
 butrayak, bu bkra yag འཇུ་བ་ཀ་ཡ།  
 butruk, bu phrug འཇུ་ཕུག།

C

chamdo, chab mdo ཆབ་མདོ།  
 chang ཆང།  
 chimé, 'chi med འཚི་མེད།  
 chimé wangmo, 'chi med dbang mo འཚི་མེད་དབང་མོ།  
 chodron, chos sgron ཚོས་སྒྲོན།  
 chokar, chos dkar ཚོས་དཀར།  
 choying dorje, chos dbyings rdo rje ཚོས་དབྱིངས་རོ་རྗེ།  
 chumarleb, chu dmar leb ཚུ་དམར་ལེབ།  
 chuzhigangdruk, chu bzhi sgang drug ཚུ་བཞི་སྐང་དུག།

D

dakok, rda kog དཀོ།  
 danma, 'dan ma དདན་མ།  
 darkar, dar dkar དར་དཀར།  
 dartsemdo, dar rtse mdo དར་རྩེ་མདོ།  
 Dashizi 大十字  
 dawa, zla ba ལྷ་བ།  
 dawa drolma, zla ba sgrol ma ལྷ་བ་སྒྲོལ་མ།  
 dawa tsering, blab a tshe ring ལྷ་བ་ཚེ་རིང།  
 dazang, zla bzang ལྷ་བ་བང།

dege, sde dges རྩེདགེ  
 dege tsering, sde dges tshe ring རྩེདགེཚེརིང།  
 demko, 'dems sko འདེམས་སྐོ།  
 denadruk, 'dan a 'brug འདན་ཨ་འབྲུག།  
 desar, sde gsar རྩེགས་ར།  
 dobdob, ldob ldob རྩོབ་རྩོབ།  
 donda, don mda' རོན་མདལ།  
 dondrubling, don grub gling རོན་གུབ་གླིང།  
 dongkar, dong kar རོང་ཀར།  
 dontra, don bkra རོན་བག།  
 donyak, don yag རོན་ཡག།  
 dorje trashi, rdo rje bkra shis རོརྩེ་བག་ཤེས།  
 dorong, rdo rong རོརོང།  
 drakar, brag dkar རྣག་དཀར།  
 dramgo, brag mgo རྣག་མགོ།  
 drandul, dgra 'dul རྣག་འདུལ།  
 drapa namgyal, grags pa rnam rgyal རྣགས་པ་རྣམ་རྒྱལ།  
 drawu, dra bu རྣ་བུ།  
 drekar, 'bras dkar འབྲས་དཀར།  
 drenbeb lhagyal, dren 'beb lha rgyal རྩེན་འབེབ་ལྷ་རྒྱལ།  
 drito, 'bri stod འབྲི་སྟོང།  
 drogon chopak, 'gro mgon chos 'phags འབྲོ་མགོན་ཚེས་འཕགས།  
 drolkar, sgrol dkar རྩོལ་དཀར།  
 drolkho, grol kho རྩོལ་ཁོ།  
 drolma, sgrol ma རྩོལ་མ།  
 droma, gro ma རྩོ་མ།  
 dronchen, gron chen རྩོན་ཚེན།  
 drongme rinyak, grong smad rin yag རྩོང་སྐད་རིན་ཡག།  
 drongto, grong stod རྩོང་སྟོང།  
 drontso, sgron msho རྩོན་མཚོ།  
 dukarkyab, gdugs dkar skyabs གདུགས་དཀར་སྐྱབས།

dungtruk, dung phrug དུང་ཕུག  
 dzagang, rdza sgang རྩ་སྐང  
 dzando, dza mdo རྩ་མདོ།  
 dzaradring, rdza ra 'bring རྩ་ར་འབྲིང  
 dzato, rdza stod རྩ་སྟོད།  
 dzinda, 'dzi mda' འཛིན་མདུག  
 dzomnyak, 'dzom nyag འཛིན་ལྷག  
 dzomo, mdzo mo འཛིན་མོ།

G

gaba, ga ba ག་བ།  
 gaga, dga' dga' དག་འ་དག་ལ།  
 gakla, 'gag la འག་ག་ལ།  
 galuk, ga lug ག་ལུག  
 gamtso, dga' mtsho དག་འ་མཚོ།  
 ganyok, dga' nyog དག་འ་ཉོག  
 gawa, sga ba ག་བ།  
 gedar, dge dar དག་དར།  
 gedun, dge 'dun དག་འདུན།  
 gegye, dge rgyas དག་རྒྱལ།  
 gelug, dge lugs དག་ལུགས།  
 gepa, ge pa ག་པ།  
 gerak, dge rag དག་རག།  
 geru, dge rus དག་རུས།  
 gesar, ge sar ག་སར།  
 getra, dge bkra དག་བརྒྱ།  
 getse, dge tshe དག་ཚེ།  
 gezang, dge bzang དག་བཟང།  
 gling གླིང།  
 gnye chen གཉེན་ཚེན།  
 gola, dgo la དག་ལ།  
 golok, mgo log མག་ལོག

gonsar, dgon gsar དགོན་གསར།  
 gonsarchoje, dgon gsar chos rje དགོན་གསར་ཚོས་རྗེ།  
 gormo, gor mo གོར་མོ།  
 gozhung, dgo gzhung དགོ་གཞུང།  
 Guomindang 国民党  
 gyalmonsawarong, rgyal mo tsha ba rong ལྷ་མོ་ཚ་བ་རོང།  
 gyaltsse, rgyal rtse ལྷ་ཙེ།  
 gyama, rgya ma ལྷ་མ།  
 gyanak lama, rgya nag bla ma ལྷ་ནག་བླ་མ།  
 gyanak tokdan, rgya nag rtogs ldan ལྷ་ནག་རྟོགས་ལྷན།  
 gyandram, rgya 'gram ལྷ་འགམ།  
 gyangse, rgyang se ལྷ་སེ།  
 gyayang, rgya yang ལྷ་ཡང།

H

Haidong 海东  
 hashul, ha shul ཧ་ཤུལ།  
 Henan 河南  
 horpa, hor pa ཧོར་པ།  
 Huangyuan 湟源  
 Huzhu 互助

J

ja, rgya ཇ།  
 jachu, bya chu ཇུ་ཇུ།  
 jago tobdan, bya sgod stobs ldan ཇུ་རྫོང་སྟོབས་ལྷན།  
 jala, bya la ཇུ་ལ།  
 jalak, bya lag ཇུ་ལག།  
 jalaknda, bya lag mda' ཇུ་ལག་མདའ།  
 jamé, bya smad ཇུ་མཐད།  
 jampa dargye, byams pa dar rgyas ཇུ་མས་པ་དར་རྒྱས།  
 jamyang, 'jam dbyangs འཇམ་དབྱེད།



jamyang khyentse wangpo, 'jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse dbang po འཇམ་ལང་མཁའ་མགོན་པོ་འཇམ་ལང་མཁའ་མགོན་པོ་འཇམ་ལང་མཁའ་མགོན་པོ་

དབྱུངས་མཁའ་མགོན་པོ་འཇམ་ལང་མཁའ་མགོན་པོ་

jamyang rinpoche, 'jam dbyangs rin po che འཇམ་ལང་མཁའ་མགོན་པོ་འཇམ་ལང་མཁའ་མགོན་པོ་

jamyang zawo, 'jam dbyangs gza' bo འཇམ་ལང་མཁའ་མགོན་པོ་འཇམ་ལང་མཁའ་མགོན་པོ་

jangtsang, 'jang tshang འཇམ་ལང་མཁའ་མགོན་པོ་

jangtsang awo, 'jang tshang a bo འཇམ་ལང་མཁའ་མགོན་པོ་

janjok, 'jan jog འཇམ་ལང་མཁའ་མགོན་པོ་

janyanyi, bya nya gnyis འཇམ་ལང་མཁའ་མགོན་པོ་

jara penpa, ja r spen pa འཇམ་ལང་མཁའ་མགོན་པོ་

jara, ca ra འཇམ་ལང་མཁའ་མགོན་པོ་

jatang, 'ja' thang འཇམ་ལང་མཁའ་མགོན་པོ་

jezang, rje bzang འཇམ་ལང་མཁའ་མགོན་པོ་

Jiangnan 江南

jikme, 'jigs med འཇམ་ལང་མཁའ་མགོན་པོ་

jinpa, sbyin pa འཇམ་ལང་མཁའ་མགོན་པོ་

jinpa khache, sbyin pa kha che འཇམ་ལང་མཁའ་མགོན་པོ་

jok, sgyogs འཇམ་ལང་མཁའ་མགོན་པོ་

jokham genam, 'jo khams dge rnams འཇམ་ལང་མཁའ་མགོན་པོ་

jokhang, jo khang འཇམ་ལང་མཁའ་མགོན་པོ་

jomda, 'jo mda' འཇམ་ལང་མཁའ་མགོན་པོ་

jushul jikme trinley, 'ju shul 'jigs med phrin las འཇམ་ལང་མཁའ་མགོན་པོ་

juzhang 局长

K

kalzang, skal bzang འཇམ་ལང་མཁའ་མགོན་པོ་

kalzang tsering, skal bzang tshe ring འཇམ་ལང་མཁའ་མགོན་པོ་

kangling, rkang gling འཇམ་ལང་མཁའ་མགོན་པོ་

kangyur, bka' 'gyur འཇམ་ལང་མཁའ་མགོན་པོ་

kang 炕

karlha, skar lha འཇམ་ལང་མཁའ་མགོན་པོ་

karma འཇམ་ལང་མཁའ་མགོན་པོ་

karma trinley, karma 'phrin las འཇམ་ལང་མཁའ་མགོན་པོ་

karmdze, dkar mdzes དཀར་མཛེས།

karmo, dkar mo དཀར་མོ།

kecho, ke chos ཀེ་ཚོས།

kham, khams ཁམས།

khamgo, kha mgo ཁ་མགོ།

khandro, mkha' 'gro མཁའ་འགྲོ།

khandro chimé gonpo, mkha' 'gro 'chi med mgon po མཁའ་འགྲོ་འཛི་མེད་མགོན་

པ།

khashul, kha shul ཁ་ཤུལ།

khoma, kho ma ཁོ་མ།

khorlo chedak, 'khor lo lce ldag འཁོར་ལོ་ལེ་ལྷག།

khyungchen, khyung chen ལྷུང་ཚེན།

kikisoso, ki ki bswo bswo ཀི་ཀི་བསྐྱོ་བསྐྱོ།

kongkong, kong kong ཀོང་ཀོང།

kunga, kung dga' ཀུན་དགལ།

kunga chophel, kung dga' chos 'phel ཀུན་དགལ་ཚོས་འཕེལ།

kunga dondrub, kun dga' don grub ཀུན་དགལ་དོན་གུབ།

kunga gyaltsan, kun dga' rgyal mtshan ཀུན་དགལ་རྒྱལ་མཚན།

kunga gyamtso, kun dga' rgya mtsho ཀུན་དགལ་རྒྱ་མཚོ།

kunga trinley. Kun dga' phrin las ཀུན་དགལ་ཕྱིན་ལས།

kunga tsering, kun dga' tshe ring ཀུན་དགལ་ཚེ་རིང།

kunga zangpo, kun dga' bzang po ཀུན་དགལ་བཟང་པོ།

Kunlun 昆仑

kunzangkyab, kun bzang skyabs ཀུན་བཟང་སྐུབས།

kyanyetang, skya nye thang ལྷན་ཉེ་ཐང།

kyichu, skyid chu ལྷིན་ལྷུ།

kyimo, skyi mo ལྷི་མོ།

kyito, skyi stod ལྷི་སྟོད།

L

laké, gla ske ལ་སྐེ།

langdarma, glang dar ma ལྷང་དར་མ།

Lanzhou 兰州

lazi 辣子

leyu, klad yu ལེལུ

lhako, lha ko ལྷ་ཀོ

lhakpa wangmo, lhag pa dbang mo ལྷ་ཀཔ་པ་དབང་མོ།

lhamdze, lha mdzes ལྷ་མངེས།

lhamo, lha mo ལྷ་མོ།

lhamo tseyak, lha mo tshe yag ལྷ་མོ་ཚེ་ཡག།

lhamtso, lha mtsho ལྷ་མཚོ།

lhasa, lha sa ལྷ་ས།

lhawa, lha ba ལྷ་བ།

lhayak, lha yag ལྷ་ཡག།

lhowa, lho ba ལྷོ་བ།

lhowa lama, lho ba bla ma ལྷོ་བ་བླ་མ།

Li 李

Liao Hansheng 廖汉生

linga, linga ལིང།

Liu Shaoqi 刘少奇

lobjong, slob sbyong ལོབ་སྟོང།

lodro zangpo, blo gros bzang po ལོ་དྲོ་སྐུ་བཟང་པོ།

losar, lo sar ལོ་སར།

loyak, lo yag ལོ་ཡག།

loyul, blo yul ལོ་ཡུལ།

lugu, lug gu ལུག་གུ།

lukzang, lug bzang ལུག་བཟང།

lungda, lung mda' ལུང་མདའ།

lungkar, lung dkar ལུང་དཀར།

lungpu, lung phu ལུང་ཕུ།

lungta, rlung rta ལུང་རྟ།

lutob, lus stob ལུས་སྟོབས།

M

Ma Bufang 马步芳

Ma Jun 马俊

madzung, rmad byung མད་བྱུང་།

makra, rmag ra མཀ་ར།

mani, ma Ni མ་ཉི།

Mao Zedong 毛泽东

marakhatsa, dmar ra kha tsha དམར་ར་ཁ་ཚ།

mato, rma stod མ་སྟོད།

mesin, me sin མེ་སིན།

Minzu Maoyi Gongsi 民族贸易公司

monlam, smon lam མོན་ལམ།

muzhung, mu gzhung མུ་གཟུང་།

mu མུ

N

nakchu, nag chu ནག་ཅུ།

nakchuka, nag chu kha ནག་ཅུ་ཁ།

nangchen, nang chen ནང་ཚེན།

ngakpa, sngags pa རྣམ་པ།

ngakwang jampal rinchen, ngag dbang 'jam dpal rin chen ནག་དབང་འཇམ་

དཔལ་རིན་ཚེན།

ngakyak, ngag yag ནག་ཡག།

ngawang dorje, ngag dbang rdo rje ནག་དབང་རྡོ་རྗེ།

ngodrub, dngos grub དངོས་གུབ།

ngoru, ngo ru རོ་རུ།

norbu, nor bu རོར་བུ།

norbu zangpo, nor bu bzang po རོར་བུ་བཟང་པོ།

norbuling རོར་བུ་གླིང་།

norbuling chodro, nor bu ling chos bro རོར་བུ་གླིང་ཚོས་བྲོ།

norbulingkha, nor bu gling kha རོར་བུ་གླིང་ཁ།

nortse, nor tshe རོར་ཚེ།

nyakrong, nyag rong ཉག་རོང་།  
 nyanchen, gnyan chen གཉན་ཚེན་།  
 nyanchen tanglha, gnyan chen thang lha གཉན་ཚེན་ཐང་ལྷ།  
 nyerchen, gnyer chen གཉེར་ཚེན་།  
 nyezhi, mye gzhis རྩེ་གཞིས།  
 nyigo, nyi rgod ཉི་གོད་།  
 nyikre, myig res རྩེ་ལ་རེས།  
 nyingma, rnying ma རྩིང་མ།

O

oga, o dga' ཨོ་དགལ།  
 omi rinam, 'o mi rin rnam འོ་མི་རིན་རྣམ།  
 orgyan nyima, o rgyan nyi ma ཨོ་རྒྱན་ཉི་མ།  
 ozer, 'od zer འོད་ཟེར།

P

pacha, pa cha པ་ཅ།  
 padma trulku, pad ma sprul sku པདྨ་སྤྱུ་སྤྱ།  
 padma yangkyi, pad ma gyang skyid པདྨ་གཡང་སྦྱིད།  
 paldan, dpal ldan དཔལ་ལྷན་།  
 paldan gyaltso, dpal ldan rgyal mtsho དཔལ་ལྷན་རྒྱལ་མཚོ།  
 paldan trashi, dpal ldan bkra shi དཔལ་ལྷན་བརྒྱ་ཤི།  
 paldan tsering, dpal ldan tshe ring དཔལ་ལྷན་ཚེ་རིང་།  
 paldanzhal, dpal ldan zhal དཔལ་ལྷན་ཞལ།  
 palmo, dpal mo དཔལ་མོ།  
 paltse, dpal tshe དཔལ་ཚེ།  
 palyak, dpal yag དཔལ་ཡག།  
 pasang tsering, pa sang tshe ring པ་སངས་ཚེ་རིང་།  
 patang, dpa' thang དཔལ་ཐང་།  
 peri, pad ri པད་རི།  
 phanpo, 'phan po བཤན་པོ།  
 phuntshok, phun tshogs ཕུན་ཚོགས།

## Q

Qinghai 青海

*qingnian kaihuang* 青年开荒

## R

rala, ra la ར་ལ།

ramda, ra mda' ར་མདལ།

rashul, ra shul ར་ཤུལ།

rebgong, reb gong རེབ་གོང།

ridzin, rig 'dzin རིན་འཛིན།

rimdro, rim 'gro རིམ་འགོ།

rinam, rin rnam རིན་རྒྱལ།

rinchen, rin chen རིན་ཚེན།

rinchen tsering, rin chen tshe ring རིན་ཚེན་ཚེ་རིང།

rinpo, rin po རིན་པོ།

rinpoche, rin po che རིན་པོ་ཚེ།

rinyang, rin gyang རིན་གཡང།

rishul, ri shul རི་ཤུལ།

riwoche, ri bo che རི་བོ་ཚེ།

ru རུ

rupadrub, rus pa sgrub རུས་པ་སྐྱབ།

## S

saga dawa, sa ga zla ba ས་ག་ལྷ་བ།

sakya, sa skya ས་སྐྱ།

sakyagung, sa skya gung ས་སྐྱ་གུང།

samdrub, bsam grub བསམ་གུབ།

samdrub mtsomo, bsam grub mtsho mo བསམ་གུབ་མཚོ་མོ།

samdrubcho, bsam grub chos བསམ་གུབ་ཚོས།

samten, bsam gtan བསམ་གཏན།

sana, sa na ས་ན།

sang, bsang བསང།

sanggye, sangs rgyas bstan 'dzin སངས་རྒྱས

sanggye tendzin, sangs rgyas bstan 'dzin སངས་རྒྱལ་བསྟན་འཛིན།  
 semcho, gser mchod གསེར་མཚོ།  
 sershul, ser shul སེར་ལུ།  
 seyima, se yi ma སེ་ཡི་མ།  
 shakya, sha' kya །ཤཱ་ཀྱ།  
 shangla, shang la །ཤང་ལ།  
 Shanxi 山西  
 shanyanyi, bya nya gnis ལྷ་ཉ་གཉིས།  
 shargu, shar 'gu །ཤར་འགུ།  
 sharikog, shar ri kog །ཤར་རི་ཀོག།  
 shelchennang, shel chen nang །ཤེལ་ཚེན་ནང།  
 shengo, shan mgo །ཤེན་མགོ།  
 sherab chozang, shes rab chos bzang །ཤེས་རབ་ཚོས་བཟང།  
 sherab gyamtso, shes rab rgya mtsho །ཤེས་རབ་རྒྱ་མཚོ།  
 sherab lodru, shes rab blo grus །ཤེས་རབ་བློ་གྲོས།  
 shigatse, gzhis ka rtse གཞིས་ཀ་རེུ།  
*shitang* 食堂  
 shorle, shor le །ཤར་ལེ།  
 Sichuan 四川  
 sipen, si pen སི་པེན།  
 sogā, bsod dga' བསོད་དགའ།  
 sokde, sog sde སོག་སྡེ།  
 sokha, gso kha གསོ་ཁ།  
 sonam, bsod nams བསོད་ནམས།  
 sonam panjor, bsod nams dpal 'byor བསོད་ནམས་དཔལ་འབྱོར།  
 sonam trashī, bsod nams bkra shis བསོད་ནམས་བརྒྱ་ཤེས།  
 T  
 tadrin, rta mgrin ཏ་མགྲིན།  
 takyab, rta skyabs ཏ་སྐུབས།  
 tangka, thang ga ཐང་ག།  
 tangka zhaldrak, thang ga zhal grags ཐང་ག་ཞལ་གྲགས།

tankho, bstan 'kho བསྟན་འཕེ  
 tendzin, bstan 'dzin བསྟན་འཛིན།  
 tenpa, ston pa རྟོན་པ།  
 tenyak, bstan yag བསྟན་ཡག  
 terlodro, gter blo gros གཏིར་བློ་གྲོས།  
 thudro, thu 'gro ལུ་འགྲོ།  
 tobgyal, stobs rgyal རྟོབས་རྒྱལ།  
 tongri, stong ri རྟོང་རི།  
 tongyur, ston 'gyur རྟོན་འགྱུར།  
 torma, gtor ma གཏིར་མ།  
 totsé, bsto tshe རྟོ་ཚེ།  
 tradé, bkra bde བརྟ་བདེ།  
 traleb, khra leb བྲ་ལེབ།  
 trashi chophel, bkra shis chos བརྟ་ཤིས་ཚོས་འཕེལ།  
 trashi chozang, bkra shis chos bzang བརྟ་ཤིས་ཚོས་བཟང།  
 trashi gyamtso, bkra shis rgya mtsho བརྟ་ཤིས་རྒྱ་མཚོ།  
 trashi jikme, bkra shis 'jigs med བརྟ་ཤིས་འཇིགས་མེད།  
 trashi norbu, bkra shis nor bu བརྟ་ཤིས་ནོར་བུ།  
 trashi penpa, bkra shis spen pa བརྟ་ཤིས་སྤོན་པ།  
 trashi tsering, bkra shis tshe ring བརྟ་ཤིས་ཚེ་རིང།  
 trashi tsewang dorjem, bkra shi tshe dbang rdo rje བརྟ་ཤི་ཚེ་དབང་རོ་རྗེ།  
 trashicho, bkra shis chos བརྟ་ཤིས་ཚོས།  
 tratse, bkra tshe བརྟ་ཚེ།  
 trawa, bkra ba བརྟ་བ།  
 trawola, khra bo la བྲ་བོ་ལ།  
 trayak, bkra yag བརྟ་ཡག  
 trindu, khri 'du ཁྲི་འདུ།  
 tritok, khri thog ཁྲི་ཐོག  
 tromtharsumdo, khrom mtha' sum mdo ཁྲོམ་མཐའ་སུམ་མདོ།  
 tsagyuna, rtsa rgyu na ཅ་རྒྱ་ན།  
 tsalkarpo, tshal dkar po ཚལ་དཀར་པོ།



tsampa, rtsam pa ཅམ་པ།  
 tsan, btsan བཅོན།  
 tsanda, btsan mda' བཅོན་མདའ།  
 tsanggyu, gtsang rgyud གཙང་རྒྱུད།  
 tsatsa, tsha tsha ཚཚ།  
 tse dondrub, tshe don drub ཚེ་དོན་གྲུབ།  
 tsechu gonpo, tshes bcu mgon po ཚེས་བཅུ་མགོན་པོ།  
 tsegyal, tshe rgyal ཚེ་རྒྱལ།  
 tsenam, tshe rnam ཚེ་རྣམ།  
 tsering, tshe ring ཚེ་རིང།  
 tsering phuntsok, tshe ring phun tshogs ཚེ་རིང་ཡུན་ཚོགས།  
 tsering sonam, tshe bsod nams ཚེ་རིང་བསོད་ནམས།  
 tsetar, tshe thar ཚེ་ཐར།  
 tsewang chodron, tshe dbang chos sgron ཚེ་དབང་ཚོས་སྦྱོན།  
 tsewo, tshe bo ཚེ་བོ།  
 tsongchu, tsong chu ཚོང་ཅུ།  
 tsongon, mtsho sngon མཚོ་སྦྱོན།  
 tsongtra, tshong bkra ཚོང་བརྒྱ།  
 tsultrim dargye, tshul khirms dar rgyas ཚུལ་ཁྲིམས་དར་རྒྱལ།  
 tutob, mthu stobs མཐུ་སྦྱོབས།  
 tutob wangyal, mthu stobs dbyang rgyal མཐུ་སྦྱོབས་དབང་རྒྱལ།

W

Wang Jinxi 王进喜

Wang Zhanjun 王占军

Wang Zhen 王震

wangchen, dbang chen དབང་ཚེན།

wangyal, dbang rgyal དབང་རྒྱལ།

Wutai 五台

X

Xiao Yang 小杨

Xinjiang 新疆

xuexi 学习

Y

yang trashi, gyang bkra shi གཡང་བག་ཤིས།

yangdzom, gyang 'dzoms གཡང་འཛོམས།

yarlung tsangpo, yar klung gtsang po ཡར་ལུང་གཙང་པོ།

Yi Buga 伊布噶

yonton gyamtso, yon tan rgya mtsho ཡོན་ཏན་རྒྱ་མཚོ།

yuan 元

yudruk lokar, gyu 'brug blo dkar གཡུ་འབྲུག་བོ་དཀར།

yungbatang, yung ba thang ཡུང་བ་བང།

Z

zamkhen, zam mkhan ཟམ་མཁན།

zangpo, bzang po བཟང་པོ།

zangpo rinchen, bzang po rin chen བཟང་པོ་རིན་ཆེན།

Zhang 张

zhewundo, zhe'u mdo ཞེ་འུ་མདོ།

zhongan, zhong rgan ཞོང་རྒན།

zhongjiqiang 重机枪

zi, gzi གཟི།

ziling, zi ling ཟི་ལིང།

zitsa, gzi tsha གཟི་ཚ།

zokya, zo skya ཟོ་སྐྱ།

zurmang, zur mang ཟུར་མང།